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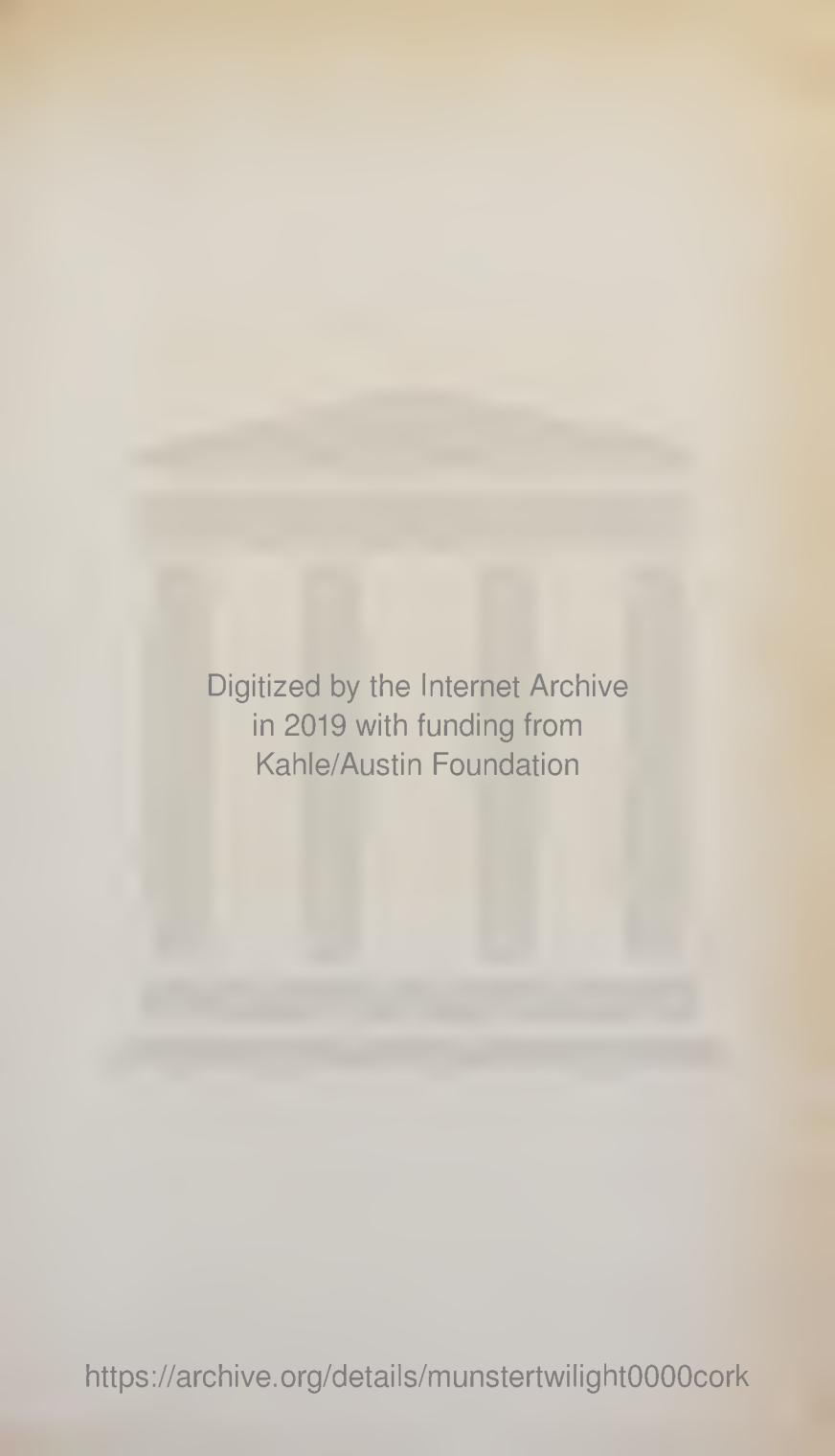
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A MUNSTER TWILIGHT

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A Munster Twilight

BY

D. CORKERY

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A MUNSTER TWILIGHT.

THE PLOUGHING OF LEACA-NA-NAOMH.

With which shall I begin—man or place? Perhaps I had better first tell of the man; of him the incident left so withered that no sooner had I laid eyes on him than I said: Here is one whose blood at some terrible moment of his life stood still, stood still and never afterwards regained its quiet, old-time ebb-and-flow. A word or two then about the place—a sculped-out shell in the Kerry mountains, an evil-looking place, green-glaring like a sea when a storm has passed. To connect man and place together, even as they worked one with the other to bring the tragedy about, ought not then to be so difficult.

I had gone into those desolate treeless hills searching after the traces of an old-time Gaelic family that once were lords of them. But in this mountainy glen I forgot my purpose almost as soon as I entered it.

In that round-ended valley—they call such a valley a coom—there was but one farmhouse, and Considine was the name of the householder—Shawn Considine, the man whose features were white with despair; his haggard appearance reminded me of what one so often sees in war-ravaged Munster—a ruined castle-wall

hanging out above the woods, a grey spectre. He made me welcome, speaking slowly, as if he was not used to such amenities. At once I began to explain my quest. I soon stumbled ; I felt that his thoughts were far away. I started again. A daughter of his looked at me—Nora was her name—looked at me with meaning ; I could not read her look aright. Haphazardly I went through old family names and recalled old-world incidents ; but with no more success. He then made to speak ; I could catch only broken phrases, repeated again and again. "In the presence of God." "In the Kingdom of God." "All gone for ever." "Let them rest in peace"—(I translate from the Irish). Others, too, there were of which I could make nothing. Suddenly I went silent. His eyes had begun to change. They were not becoming fiery or angry—that would have emboldened me, I would have blown on his anger ; a little passion, even an outburst of bitter temper would have troubled me but little if in its sudden revelation I came on some new fact or even a new name in the broken story of that ruined family. But no ; not fiery but cold and terror-stricken were his eyes becoming. Fear was rising in them like dank water. I withdrew my gaze, and his daughter ventured on speech :

"If you speak of the cattle, noble person, or of the land, or of the new laws, my father will converse with you ; but he is dark about what happened long ago." Her eyes were even more earnest than her tongue—they implored the pity of silence.

So much for the man. A word now about the place where his large but neglected farmhouse stood against a bluff of rock. To enter that evil-looking green-mountained glen was like entering the jaws of some slimy, cold-blooded animal. You felt yourself leaving the

sun, you shrunk together, you hunched yourself as if to bear an ugly pressure. In the far-back part of it was what is called in the Irish language a *leaca*—a slope of land, a lift of land, a bracket of land jutting out from the side of a mountain. This leaca, which the daughter explained was called Leaca-na-Naomh—the Leaca of the Saints—was very remarkable. It shone like a gem. It held the sunshine as a field holds its crop of golden wheat. On three sides it was pedestalled by the sheerest rock. On the fourth side it curved up to join the parent mountain-flank. Huge and high it was, yet height and size took some time to estimate, for there were mountains all around it. When you had been looking at it for some time you said aloud: "That leaca is high!" When you had stared for a longer time you said: "That leaca is immensely high—and huge!" Still the most remarkable thing about it was the way it held the sunshine. When all the valley had gone into the gloom of twilight—and this happened in the early afternoon—the leaca was still at mid-day. When the valley was dark with night and the lamps had been long alight in the farm-house, the leaca had still the red gleam of sunset on it. It hung above the misty valley like a velarium—as they used to call that awning-cloth which hung above the emperor's seat in the amphitheatre.

"What is it called, do you say?" I asked again.

"Leaca-na-Naomh," she replied.

"Saints used to live on it?"

"The Hermits," she answered, and sighed deeply.

Her trouble told me that that leaca had to do with the fear that was burrowing like a mole in her father's heart. I would test it. Soon afterwards the old man came by, his eyes on the ground, his lips moving.

"That leaca," I said, "what do you call it?"

He looked up with a startled expression. He was very white ; he couldn't abide my steady gaze.

"Nora," he cried, raising his voice suddenly and angrily, "cas isteach iad, cas isteach iad!" He almost roared at the gentle girl.

"Turn in—what?" I said, roughly, "the cattle are in long ago."

"'Tis right they should," he answered, leaving me.

Yes, this leaca and this man had between them moulded out a tragedy, as between two hands.

Though the sun had gone still I sat staring at it. It was far off, but whatever light remained in the sky had gathered to it. I was wondering at its clear definition among all the vague and misty mountain-shapes when a voice, quivering with age, high and untuneful, addressed me :

"'Twould be right for you to see it when there's snow on it."

"Ah!"

"'Tis blinding!" The voice had changed so much as his inner vision strengthened that I gazed up quickly at him. He was a very old man, somewhat fairy-like in appearance, but he had the eyes of a boy! These eyes told me he was one who had lived imaginatively. Therefore I almost gripped him lest he should escape ; from him would I learn of Leaca-na-Naomh. Shall I speak of him as a vassal of the house, or as a tatter of the family, or as a spall of the rough landscape? He was native to all three. His homespun was patched with patches as large and as straight-cut as those you'd see on a fisherman's sail. He was, clothes and all, the same colour as the aged lichen of the rocks ; but his eyes were as fresh as dew.

Gripping him, as I have said, I searched his face, as one searches a poem for a hidden meaning.

"When did it happen, this dreadful thing?" I said.

He was taken off his guard. I could imagine, I could almost feel his mind struggling, summoning up an energy sufficient to express his idea of how as well as when the thing happened. At last he spoke deliberately.

"When the master,"—I knew he meant the householder—"was at his best, his swiftest and strongest in health, in riches, in force and spirit." He hammered every word.

"Ah!" I said; and I noticed the night had begun to thicken, fitly I thought, for my mind was already making mad leaps into the darkness of conjecture. He began to speak a more simple language:

"In those days he was without burden or ailment—unless maybe every little biteen of land between the rocks that he had not as yet brought under the plough was a burden. This, that, yonder, all those fine fields that have gone back again into heather and furze, it was he made them. There's sweat in them! But while he bent over them in the little dark days of November, dropping his sweat, he would raise up his eyes and fix them on the leaca. *That* would be worth all of them, and worth more than double all of them if it was brought under the plough."

"And why not?" I said.

"Plough the bed of the saints?"

"I had forgotten."

"You are not a Gael of the Gaels maybe?"

"I had forgotten; continue; it grows chilly."

"He had a serving-man; he was a fool; they were common in the country then; they had not been as yet herded into asylums. He was a fool; but a true Gael. That he never forgot; except once."

"Continue."

"He had also a sire horse, Griosach he called him, he was so strong, so high and princely."

"A plough horse?"

"He had never been harnessed. He was the master's pride and boast. The people gathered on the hillsides when he rode him to Mass. You looked at the master; you looked at the horse; the horse knew the hillsides were looking at him. He made music with his hoofs, he kept his eyes to himself, he was so proud."

"What of the fool?"

"Have I spoken of the fool?"

"Yes, a true Gael."

"'Tis true, that word. He was as strong as Griosach. He was what no one else was: he was a match for Griosach. The master petted the horse. The horse petted the master. Both of them knew they went well together. But Griosach the sire horse feared Liam Ruadh the fool; and Liam Ruadh the fool feared Griosach the sire horse. For neither had as yet found out that he was stronger than the other. They would play together like two strong boys, equally matched in strength and daring. They would wrestle and throw each other. Then they would leave off; and begin again when they had recovered their breath.

"Yes," I said, "the master, the horse Griosach, the fool Liam—now, the Leaca, the Leaca."

"I have brought in the leaca. It will come in again, now! The master was one day standing at a gap for a long time; there was no one near him. Liam Ruadh came near him. 'It is not lucky to be so silent as that,' he said. The master raised his head and answered:

"'The Leaca for wheat.'

"The fool nearly fell down in a sprawling heap. No one had ever heard of anything like that.

" ' No,' he said like a child.

" ' The Leaca for wheat,' the master said again, as if there was someone inside him speaking.

" The fool was getting hot and angry.

" ' The Leaca for prayer ! ' he said.

" ' The Leaca for wheat,' said the master, a third time.

" When the fool heard him he gathered himself up and roared—a loud ' O-oh ! ' it went around the hills like sudden thunder ; in the little breath he had left he said : ' The Leaca for prayer ! '

" The master went away from him ; who could tell what might have happened ?

" The next day the fool was washing a sheep's diseased foot—he had the struggling animal held firm in his arms when the master slipped behind him and whispered in his ear :

" ' The Leaca for wheat.'

" Before the fool could free the animal the master was gone. He was a wild, swift man that day. He laughed. It was that self-same night he went into the shed where Liam slept and stood a moment looking at the large face of the fool working in his dreams. He watched him like that a minute. Then he flashed the lantern quite close into the fool's eyes so as to dazzle him, and he cried out harshly, ' The Leaca for wheat,' making his voice appear far off, like a trumpet-call, and before the fool could understand where he was, or whether he was asleep or awake, the light was gone and the master was gone.

" Day after day the master put the same thought into the fool's ear. And Liam was becoming sullen and dark. Then one night long after we were all in our sleep we heard a wild crash. The fool had gone to the master's room. He found the door bolted. He put his shoulder

to it. The door went in about the room, and the arch above it fell in pieces around the fool's head—all in the still night.

"'Who's there? What is it?' cried the master, starting up in his bed.

"'Griosach for the plough!' said the fool.

"No one could think of Griosach being hitched to a plough. The master gave him no answer. He lay down in his bed and covered his face. The fool went back to his straw. Whenever the master now said 'The Leaca for wheat' the fool would answer 'Griosach for the plough.'

"The tree turns the wind aside, yet the wind at last twists the tree. Like wind and tree master and fool played against each other, until at last they each of them had spent their force.

"'I will take Griosach and Niamh and plough the leaca,' said the fool; it was a hard November day.

"'As you wish,' said the master. Many a storm finishes with a little sob of wind. Their voices were now like a little wind.

"The next night a pair of smiths were brought into the coom all the way from Aunascawl. The day after that the mountains were ringing with their blows as the ploughing-gear was overhauled. Without rest or laughter or chatter the work went on, for Liam was at their shoulders, and he hardly gave them time to wipe their sweaty hair. One began to sing: 'Tis my grief on Monday now,' but Liam struck him one blow and stretched him. He returned to his work quiet enough after that. We saw the fool's anger rising. We made way for him; and he was going back and forth the whole day long; in the evening his mouth began to froth and his tongue to blab. We drew away from him; wondering

what he was thinking of. The master himself began to grow timid; he hadn't a word in him; but he kept looking up at us from under his brow as if he feared we would turn against him. Sure we wouldn't; wasn't he our master—even what he did?

"When the smiths had mounted their horses that night to return to Aunascawl one of them stooped down to the master's ear and whispered: 'Watch him, he's in a fever.'

"'Who?'

"'The fool.' That was a true word.

"Some of us rode down with the smiths to the mouth of the pass, and as we did so snow began to fall silently and thickly. We were glad; we thought it might put back the dreadful business of the ploughing. When we returned towards the house we were talking. But a boy checked us.

"'Whisht!' he said.

"We listened. We crept beneath the thatch of the stables. Within we heard the fool talking to the horses. We knew he was putting his arms around their necks. When he came out, he was quiet and happy-looking. We crouched aside to let him pass. Then we told the master.

"'Go to your beds,' he said, coldly enough.

"We played no cards that night; we sang no songs; we thought it too long until we were in our dark beds. The last thing we thought of was the snow falling, falling, falling on Leaca-na-Naomh and on all the mountains. There was not a stir or a sigh in the house. Everyone feared to hear his own bed creak. And at last we slept.

"What awoke me? I could hear voices whispering. There was fright in them. Before I could distinguish one word from another I felt my neck creeping. I

shook myself. I leaped up. I looked out. The light was blinding. The moon was shining on the slopes of new snow. There was none falling now; a light, thin wind was blowing out of the lovely stars.

"Beneath my window I saw five persons standing in a little group, all clutching one another like people standing in a flooded river. They were very still; they would not move even when they whispered. As I wondered to see them so fearfully clutching one another a voice spoke in my room:

"'For God's sake, Stephen, get ready and come down.'

"'Man, what's the matter with ye?'

"'For God's sake come down.'

"'Tell me, tell me!'

"'How can I? Come down!'

"I tried to be calm; I went out and made for that little group, putting my hand against my eyes, the new snow was so blinding.

"'Where's the master?' I said.

"'There!' They did not seem to care whether or not I looked at the master.

"He was a little apart; he was clutching a jut of rock as if the land was slipping from his feet. His cowardice made me afraid. I was hard put to control my breath.

"'What are ye, are ye all staring at?' I said.

"'Leaca-na——'—the voice seemed to come from over a mile away, yet it was the man beside me had spoken.

"I looked. The leaca was a dazzling blaze, it was true, but I had often before seen it as bright and wonderful. I was puzzled.

"'Is it the leaca ye're all staring——'—I began; but several of them silently lifted up a hand and pointed

towards it. I could have stared at them instead ; whether or not it was the white moonlight that was on them, they looked like men half-frozen, too chilled to speak. But I looked where those outstretched hands silently bade me. Then I, too, was struck dumb and became one of that icy group, for I saw a little white cloud moving across the Leaca, a feathery cloud, and from the heart of it there came every now and then a little flash of fire, a spark. Sometimes, too, the little cloud would grow thin, as if it were scattering away, at which times it was a moving shadow we saw. As I blinked at it I felt my hand groping about to catch something, to catch someone, to make sure of myself ; for the appearance of everything, the whiteness, the stillness, and then that moving cloud whiter than everything else, whiter than anything in the world, and so like an angel's wing moving along the leaca, frightened me until I felt like fainting away. To make things worse, straight from the little cloud came down a whisper, a long, thin, clear, silvery cry : ' Griosach ! Ho-o-o-oh ! Ho-o-o-oh ! ' a ploughing cry. We did not move ; we kept our silence : everyone knew that that cry was going through everyone else as through himself, a stroke of coldness. Then I understood why the master was hanging on to a rock ; he must have heard the cry before anyone else. It was terrible, made so thin and silvery by the distance ; and yet it was a cry of joy—the fool had conquered Griosach !

" I do not know what wild thoughts had begun to come into my head when one man in the group gasped out ' Now ! ' and then another, and yet another. Their voices were breath, not sound. Then they all said ' Ah ! ' and I understood the fear that had moved their tongues. I saw the little cloud pause a moment on the edge of the leaca, almost hang over the edge, and then begin

to draw back from it. The fool had turned his team on the verge and was now ploughing up against the hill.

"'O-o-h,' said the master, in the first moment of relief; it was more like a cry of agony. He looked round at us with ghastly eyes; and our eyeballs turned towards his, just as cold and fixed. Again that silvery cry floated down to us 'Griosach! Ho-o-o-oh!' And again the stroke of coldness passed through every one of us. The cry began to come more frequently, more triumphantly, for now again the little cloud was ploughing down the slope, and its pace had quickened. It was making once more for that edge beneath which was a sheer fall of hundreds of feet.

"Behind us, suddenly, from the direction of the thatched stables came a loud and high whinny—a call to a mate. It was so unexpected, and we were all so rapt up in what was before our eyes, that it shook us, making us spring from one another. I was the first to recover.

"'My God,' I said, 'that's Niamh, that's Niamh!'

"The whinny came again; it was Niamh surely.

"'What is he ploughing with, then? What has he with Griosach?'

"A man came running from the stables; he was trying to cry out: he could hardly be heard:

"'Griosach and Lugh! Griosach and Lugh!'

"Lugh was another sire horse; and the two sires would eat each other; they always had ill-will for each other. The master was staring at us.

"''Tisn't Lugh?' he said, with a gurgle in his voice.

"No one could answer him. We were thinking if the mare's cry reached the sires their anger would blaze up and no one could hold them; but why should Liam have yoked such a team?

"'Hush! hush!' said a woman's voice.

"We at once heard a new cry; it came down from the leaca:

"'Griosach, Back! Back!' It was almost inaudible, but we could feel the swiftness and terror in it. 'Back! Back!' came down again. 'Back, Griosach, back!'

"'They're fighting, they're fighting—the sires!' one of our horse-boys yelled out—the first sound above a breath that had come from any of us, for he was fonder of Lugh than of the favourite Griosach, and had forgotten everything else. And we saw that the little cloud was almost at a stand-still; yet that it was disturbed; sparks were flying from it; and we heard little clanking sounds, very faint, coming from it. They might mean great leaps and rearings.

"Suddenly we saw the master spring from that rock to which he had been clinging as limp as a leaf in autumn, spring from it with great life and roar up towards the leaca:

"'Liam! Liam! Liam Ruadh!' He turned to us, 'Shout, boys, and break his fever,' he cried, 'Shout, shout!'

"We were glad of that.

"'Liam! Liam! Liam Ruadh!' we roared.

"'My God! My God!' we heard as we finished. It was the master's voice; he then fell down. At once we raised our voices again; it would keep us from seeing or hearing what was happening on the leaca.

"'Liam! Liam! Liam Ruadh!'

"There was wild confusion.

"'Liam! Liam! Liam! Ruadh! Ruadh! Ruadh!' the mountains were singing back to us, making the confusion worse. We were twisted about—one man staring at the ground, one at the rock in front of his face, another

at the sky high over the leaca, and one had his hand stretched out like a sign-post on a hilltop, I remember him best; none of us were looking at the leaca itself. But we were listening and listening, and at last they died, the echoes, and there was a cold silence, cold, cold. Then we heard old Diarmuid's passionless voice begin to pray:

"'Abhaile ar an sioruidheacht go raibh a anam.' 'At home in Eternity may his soul——.' We turned round, one by one, without speaking a word, and stared at the leaca. It was bare! The little cloud was still in the air—a white dust, ascending. Along the leaca we saw two thin shadowy lines—they looked as if they had been drawn in very watery ink on its dazzling surface. Of horses, plough, and fool there wasn't a trace. They had gone over the edge while we roared."

"Noble person, as they went over I'm sure Liam Ruadh had one fist at Lugh's bridle, and the other at Griosach's, and that he was swinging high in the air between them. Our roaring didn't break his fever, say that it didn't, noble person? But don't question the master about it. I have told you all!"

. . . . . .

"I will leave this place to-night," I said.

"It is late, noble person."

"I will leave it now, bring me my horse."

That is why I made no further inquiries in that valley as to the fate of that old Gaelic family that were once lords of those hills. I gave up the quest. Sometimes a thought comes to me that Liam Ruadh might have been the last of an immemorial line, no scion of which, if God had left him his senses, would have ploughed the Leaca of the Saints, no, not even if it were to save him from begging at fairs and in public houses.

THE RETURN.

Where Ankle Lane joins Blarney Street there are four high houses, dark-looking and very old, of that sort lane-dwellers call "fabrics" or "castles." The number of inhabitants varies from day to day: tricky-men in for the races will stay two nights, cattle-drovers only one; in periods of idleness a group of coal-porters sometimes attains to a certain solidarity—the same figures go in and out the doors day after day—but, just as happens in a factory, change sets in with prosperity; new faces come and go; and the next period of idleness sees a new colony, the same in its general characteristics, though made up of quite different individuals, repeat the fortunes of the last.

The largest, the darkest of these four houses was kept by a widow named Tynan; Bonnety Tynan she was called, from a wisp of a bonnet that clung to her scanty hairs; the other lodging-house keepers wore shawls. Her face was crabbed, shut like a fist against craft, reduced to its smallest and toughest by dint of years of hard-dealing. And her bonnet was equally shorn of its beams; this, too, was now not much bigger than a fist, but the legend still held that it was the lodging-house keeper's money-box. Sometimes she would have as many as thirty men under her roof, most of them idle, so her hardness, her aloofness were needed. How else could she have managed them? The Law?—it was too complicated; and besides, she kept too irregular a house to care to invoke it. She had laws and ejectment-processes of her own. Sometimes she conceived suspicion of a lodger; she waited till his back was turned; then she

would slap a few buckets of water over his bed ; he returned to find it sodden ; and she went on with her washing while he stamped and cursed.

In the beginning of winter one evening towards six o'clock, as she shuffled in along the dark hall, she was surprised to see a glare of firelight breaking out towards her from the kitchen ; she had been out of the house for some hours and hoped for nothing better than a spark in the bottom of the grate.

Opening the squeaking door she was still more surprised : a great figure, a darkness, sat on a stool before the fire ; she noticed the curving width of his back ; the huge head bent forward—he was asleep. She went silently up to him, bending to see his face : it was tanned ; she glanced at his hands : they were dark with tar, knobby, and had blue rings and flags tattooed on them ; but it was the hard, exaggerated-looking creases in his serge clothes that spoke his trade most clearly—these clothes had been folded tightly for weeks, perhaps for months, in the bottom of a seaman's chest. She shook him : " Come on now—wake up, who are 'oo ? who are 'oo ? "

He growled ; then his voice softened ; he rose and stretched himself, very much at his ease ; a light came into his sea-bleared eyes ; he examined the old woman's face with interest, with amusement apparently. " You're not changed a ha'p'orth," he said, " not a ha'p'orth."

She stared up ; he was handsome in such a place.

" Sit down," she said, " I can't call to mind what your name is—'tis after escaping me mimory."

With a seaman's licence he put his great arm about her, drew her towards the glowing fire, and said again :

" You're not changed a ha'p'orth."

" I don't know you," she snapped out, breaking away.

"If you don't there's not a soul in Cork to say who I am—I'm Jim Daunt that was."

A memory or two, quite unimportant, stirred in her brain:

"So you are, so you are; you're welcome; how long will you be staying?"

"Till half-past eleven, anyway," he said.

"Where's the boat—Queenstown?"

"No—the Jetties," he answered, "and I must be aboard for midnight."

. . . . . .

She treated him well; she gave him a couple of eggs and many rounds of bread; yet for a seaman he made but a scanty meal.

"You're not doing well?" she said.

"If I only had it yesterday," he said, "you'd see the death I'd give it."

She moved about in the silent way of a woman who is accustomed to keep people at a distance. It was he who spoke:

"Isn't this a quare thing," he said, "I was never a bit lonesome wherever I was on sea or land—thousands of miles away—never a bit lonesome till this evening sitting there on that there stool?"

She believed him; for she knew these sailormen well; and how any shelter that has the look, or even the name of home, stirs them.

"You were a great long time out," he continued, half complaining.

"How did I know you'd be here?"

"When did you leave the house?"

"Near four, I expect."

"Well, now, look at that," he said. "You mustn't have been well round the corner when I came in; and

here I stopped, for I couldn't go away again—couldn't go away. Was I asleep when you came in ?"

A lodger they called Brother entered ; Mrs. Tynan made the two men known to each other. The sailorman wanted drink to be sent for ; Bonnety, however, wouldn't have it : there was plenty of time, and, besides, drink was no food for a man after a day's work. Brother seconded her ; Saturday Night would be coming in soon, and he was the best of company ; 'twas company a man wanted after being shut up for months in a wind-bag, "Wasn't it, matey ?" he said, taking the seaman's hand. A radiance had come into Brother's face : unexpected joy is straight from the hands of the gods : exhausted, heavy in all his limbs from climbing with a laden hod forty-foot ladders from early morning—terrible work—he had hoped for nothing beyond a single drink in Miss Nora's, and lo ! the pleasures of a revel were emerging in his imagination.

"Have you enough of it ?" he said.

"Of what ?"

"The say ?"

"God knows an' I have," said the sailor, with unexpected earnestness, "but isn't it a quare thing to say that I was never a bit lonesome till this evening sitting there on that there stool ?"

"How so ?" said Brother.

And then with lingering detail the sailor told how he had kept watch while Mrs. Tynan was down in Miss Nora's.

. . . . . .

Saturday Night came in after a few moments ; in every feature, in every limb he had become misshapen by dint of combat ; his most restful attitude challenged ; yet in Brother's words he was the best of company : spirit is spirit.

Brother, introducing the men, mentioned the sailor's former connection with the house: "There's no house like the old house," he said, and Saturday Night, gripping the sailor's hand, told him that though he had never met him before, he felt they were old friends already: "There's something draws me to you," he said, and the sailor answered: "A fellow don't hear words like them from foreigners."

And three minutes afterwards he told Saturday Night that he had never known what it was to be down-hearted till that evening, sitting on that there stool before the fire. And, indicating Brother, "Himself will tell you," he answered Saturday Night's look of inquiry.

Again he wanted to send out for drink; but again the landlady blanked the proposal: "What hurry was there? wasn't the night long enough? couldn't they wait for Johnny Swaine at least?"

Instead of Johnny Swaine came Katty Sullivan, saying as her first word:

"Isn't Johnny here?"

"Not yet," and they bade her sit down.

"By James, I might as well," she said: the form of swear she had invented herself, and its use seemed to lift her above the common throng; yet she needed no such aid; by nature she was above her surroundings. Strong and happy, with full, firm flesh, her face coloured like ripe corn, her eyes blue and bright as the skies that go with it, she was large-hearted, and merry and frank because of her fearlessness, of her consciousness of power.

"Here's a lonely sailorman wouldn't object to a bit of company," said Saturday Night, and "'tis a thing no wan objects to," she answered, in a tone that had as much daring as pity in it. Her words seemed to take the sailorman off his guard; the impudence in his face

withered before her eyes. She had laid her spell on him ; but everyone saw that some weakness of spirit denied his rising to it : he looked like a sick sportsman who, on a morning of sunshine, suddenly discovers that he is unable to lift his body from the bed. The moment's unrest was swallowed in a whirl of words, for Katty Sullivan was one they all liked to talk with. She was one of those who, though they might give a man a " wipe " across the mouth, never get on their dignity, an attitude that takes all heart out of a night's merriment. Soon Johnny Swaine came seeking Katty, even as she had been seeking him ; and the sailor saw at once that he was her accepted lover, and with the knowledge a touch of daring came back into his look ; his eyes, in spite of himself, as it were, would now find themselves resting on Johnny's face. Brother was sent for drink ; he returned with two friends ; " 'twould go to me heart to refuse them," he explained to the sailor.

The sailor drank nothing but raw whiskey, and it soon appeared that his loneliness had gone from him ; so, too, had his hold on himself. He became aggressive ; when Brother was telling his champion tale of a sailor who, having deserted, signed on again in the self-same ship under stress of drink, the sailor stopped him half-way, and in his mouth the story from being a mere fill-gap became wild and thrilling. And almost without a pause he went on to tell the story of a parson's daughter of Adelaide, the girl who hid herself in a ship's hold for the sake of a young captain—how she might now be met with in the cities of the South American seaboard, in Buenos Ayres or Rio—the sailors speak of her as the Australian Rose. He had seen her himself. His voice became higher and louder ; he seemed to be talking against time, and his eyes shifted continually from face

to face. He twitted Brother on his powers of drinking; he joked Saturday Night on his wounds; yet somehow his merriment was not contagious; and they all sniffed trouble when he began to raise bad blood between the lovers, for they could see that Katty's eyes were rife for mischief.

Johnny, she said, would have gone sailoring himself only for the wetness of the sea and his love for his mother; anyway, he wouldn't like to be pickled as well as drownded and, by James! she wouldn't care to see him pickled herself; "he'd be a terrible sight!" Then the sailor, with great concern, asked her what would she do if Johnny went off with another girl? She laughed, bent with laughter at the idea, and the whole room laughed uneasily with her. And so Johnny Swaine, made scapegoat for the company, sat by the girl's side, looking with glum eyes at his unfinished drink. But at the end of a bout of merriment the sailor stretched his hand to him saying that a joke was a joke; Johnny would not even look at the proffered hand. "Anyway, fetch us the measure," the sailor continued with some diplomacy; and Swaine, thinking of peace with honour, rose from his place and made for the can. Without a sound the sailor sprang into the vacant space at the girl's side, and Johnny, turning, found him there. A roar of laughter addled him, maddened him. He flung the gallon about the floor, squared out, and his voice rose above the jubilee: "Stand up, if you're a man."

"Miss Sullivan," the sailor's voice was heard saying in the sudden, expectant silence, "isn't it lovely weather?"

"Stand up, I say."

"A beautiful night?"

"Will you stand up?"

And the girl's eyes danced to see such spirit in her lover.

"You won't, won't you?" and Johnny's open hand met the sailor's cheek with a ringing blow. In a flash the two men were dancing at each other, the sailor all activity, his voice jerking out the best known of all the chanties:

Ranzo was no sailor;
Ranzo, boys, Ranzo.

And every time he came to "Ranzo" in the refrain—the word on which the rope is dragged as they hoist sail—he struck or rather touched Johnny's face or side or ears: he played with the landsman, dancing round him, tipping him wherever he wished.

The captain was a bad man;
Ranzo, boys, Ranzo!
The mate he was a good man;
Ranzo, boys, Ranzo!

The company seeing that he did not mean to punish his man let their mirth loose; they began to cry out: "Go it, Johnny, go it, old man." But after some time the sailor became over-confident, became careless; Johnny, on the other hand, had recovered his self-possession. Seeing a chance, he stood statue-still for a moment; then, making a wild charge, struck full in the sailor's face. The sea-blood fired up; song and dance ceased; with swift, careful drives he drove Johnny back, back, almost into the fire-grate. The room had become silent. Both men seemed to be fighting for life. They panted; their feet scraped the floor. Katty stood up: "Sir," she said, in a breathy voice that was scarcely audible, "Sir, sir,"; but neither fighters nor onlookers heard her at all.

Suddenly shuffling steps were heard coming in the hall,

and "Police," whispered Brother; for policemen walk into such houses in the same manner as factory-inspectors enter factories. At the word the sailor's face went white; he turned half-round from his man towards the room door; and Johnny, who had not perhaps heard Brother's warning, battered him right and left with great will.

"Wait awhile," said the sailor, all confusion, still staring at the door.

"Come on," shouted Johnny, wondering what had happened.

All faces were on the door; some of the men were gripping others by the shoulders. It was old Ned Mulcahy, the mason, who stuck in his head. The next moment the sailor was dancing once more around Johnny.

He gave him five and twenty;
Ranzo, boys, Ranzo.

His terror had lifted; he resumed his antics, and soon he had Johnny hemmed into a corner, where he kept him until he had his nose pumping blood. Then the combatants were separated.

"He's a game fighter, anyway," said the sailor, releasing him; and Katty Sullivan, passing the defeated man a handkerchief, thought in her heart of hearts that she wouldn't give him for all the tanned-faced sailors on the sea.

. . . . . .

It was now high time for the sailor to be going if he was to make his ship by midnight; yet he dawdled to hear the end of a story, to turn a joke, to look at Johnny's nose. He lingered too long; for Saturday Night suddenly began to tell the tale he always reserved till he had become quite emotional in his drink. They were unloading the "Cyclamen," he said, and the first glimmer of

dawn was coming on the river and, merciful God! he saw a woman floating down the tide, her golden hair spread out on top of the water. They got her into a boat—the handsomest woman he ever laid eyes on, and he tried to persuade the men to say nothing at all about the matter, only just take the corpse up to Burnt Lane on a shutter and give her a decent wake with candles, and Christian burial in the Gardens; but they wouldn't, they were afraid of the law; and the police came, and the first words the sergeant said were (and Saturday Night wept to repeat them): "What do you know about this *person*?" "What do you know about this *person*?" Saturday Night spoke the words again, turning towards the sailor; and "Was that what he said?" the sailor gasped out, but his voice was so strange that the whole room on the instant forgot the story; the sailor's jaw had become locked, his neck rigid, his head looked as if carved in hardwood, the eyes unskilfully painted—a blank stare. But he lifted himself up, and "I'll be late," he said, in a voice that beseeched them not to question or hinder him; he had broken down; he could not explain himself—at least, this is what they would think.

"Good night," he said, putting out his hand to Katty Sullivan in a sudden, jerky way, his eyes meanwhile turned away from all the faces. She took no notice; she let on to be speaking to Johnny, who was now once more at her side. Without another word the sailor vanished from their midst.

After a pause the old woman spoke in her hardest voice: "Did any of ye see that fellow coming in here?"

No one spoke; in the silence Brother cracked a match on the bowl of his pipe.

"He said he came in here to-day after I wint out."

"And sure he might."

" I'd like to know," the old woman rejoined, and she lit two candles—a signal for them to retire.

" He said he was asleep," she added, " he was no more asleep than I was."

" Holy Mother ! " said Katty Sullivan, as she rose to go, " I'm sorry I iver laid eyes on him."

. . . . . .

Now, I think that the sailor, as he stumbled down the deserted hillside streets towards the river, shook himself and stood still a moment here, stood still a moment elsewhere, saying at every pause : " 'Twill be all right—what a fool I am ! "

Anyway, he got to his ship ; made to walk up the plank with his head in the air, and—who knows how the end came ?

But the next day they brought up two dead bodies from between his ship and the quay-wall ; one of them, the second mate it was, had a knife-wound in the right lung and another in the back below the lung ; the second body, bearing no signs of struggle on it, was our sailorman, Jim Daunt ; and it was proved by the stopping of their watches and otherwise that one body had been a couple of hours longer in the water than the other. Saturday Night says that as he went up the plank maybe he heard a voice saying " What do you know about this *person* ? " but Brother says that 'tis how he threw himself in, for he saw that the whole race of men were turning against him—look at how Katty Sullivan, with no reason at all, *couldn't* shake hands with him. Johnny Swaine says they all came well out of it, as if a murderer has evil spirits at his beck and call.

But what brought the sailorman up to Bonnety Tynan's at all ? Was he trying to prove an alibi ? Or was it that the word Home was ringing in his brain ?

STORM-STRUCK.

I.

On an August afternoon the fishing village of Cuandor on the west Cork coast is like a dream-village ; it is so still. Its rocky street is then a strip of sunshine, a strip of shadow ; and not a soul crosses from the one to the other : the men are far on the sea, they have sailed in their nobbies and ketches for the Manx fishing-grounds ; and the women are at work in their gardens, bent over the violets they grow in ridges, like potatoes, for the London markets.

On such a day John Donovan arrived home from Butte City, Montana. It looked as if he had stolen home. Even so, the news was not long spreading from hedge to hedge—an empty story.

Nightfall brought no relief. Instead of his coming into Lavelle's public-house, there came Jack Kiniry from Ringogreine. On his way he had passed the Donovans' house, and his tale was that the place was dark and silent. And as he said so, his questioners saw it in vision—a windy, stony place, just where the good land ended and the cliffs began. Because it was so poor, the boy, John Donovan, had sailed six years before for America.

The following day was Sunday. The church bell had tolled for Mass ; yet still, as was customary, the dark-cloaked women and the sun-tanned men from the hills lingered in groups. They whispered in low voices that the boy of the Donovans' had come home—a blinded man. But when, at the end of the rocky street, the group

they had waited for appeared, the blind man and his aged father, the peasants moved silently into the church, where already the priest was praying on the altar.

As the old man, bent almost double from years and the slavery of his toil, led his son over the uneven ground, he looked up from under his brows, to right, to left, and spoke no word. He looked like one who had done something wrong. But his son was more than erect, his head flung nervously up in that sorry posture common to blind men and dreamers, his blank eyes sweeping equally landscape and sky and sea.

This had Butte City, Montana, done for him. A flash of light in the gloom of a copper mine, a rumble, a tremor; then, silence. Afterwards, amid a whispering of nun-like voices, the gradual return of consciousness in a bed of snow-white sheets, snow-white to judge by the feel of them. "I want to go home," he whined, like a boy who fails half-way in an adventure. Then recalling the explosion, he fainted again, and, as he did so, he heard someone whisper that his sight was gone.

The first night at home he scarcely spoke a word. His father and mother in their lonely house had lived more or less always in silence; and he, since his loss, had become acquainted with it. Perhaps, this first night, he was listening to the loud ticking of the weight-clock or to the crying seagulls. But after a long pause he blurted out: "Where's Kitty Regan now?"

The old man and woman looked at each other, neither quite ready to answer; they knew what Kitty Regan had meant to him before his departure to America; they knew why there he had chosen the slavery of the copper-mines and had hoarded his earnings. The father thought it better to speak carelessly, as if it now was all an old story:

" Oh, she married into Kilvonane parish."

" I thought so," said the blind man.

And in spite of his effort at control a quiver crossed his face, such as might happen in a dream. It went through his mother like a sword. She rose, putting an arm around his shoulder, laying her hand on his :

" Don't mind, boy," she said ; " maybe 'tis she wasn't worthy of you—and look at the man she got ; God help us, 'tis a hard life she has." And the mother pressed the son to her breast.

He sprang to his feet.

" What's this ? Bless me ! We're not going to have scenes, sure we're not."

And forgetting himself, he flung forward from her hands and fell on the chair she had risen from. Steadying himself, he cursed several times in a voice that was hard and strange to them ; it was his Butte City voice.

At first he took to sitting outside the door in the sunshine, and by dint of short and bitter answers soon rid himself of the gossips of the place. It seemed he could satisfy himself for ever with listening to the seagulls and rooks. However, after some weeks, he made friends with a boy named Conny Maher, and the two of them would go for long rambles on the cliff-tops. One day they got as far as Fylenashouk, the most windy, the highest of all the cliffs ; and ever afterwards this was his favourite resting-place. It stands sheer above the sea : eastwards there is the long promontory running out to the Galley Head, in summer time a strip of gold terminating in a white point ; westwards the coast is fringed with groups of rocky islets, pearly in the sun. Perhaps he remembered west and east in the touch of the wind.

One day in the late autumn, sitting there alone, he felt the sun darken ; then a large rain-drop stabbed the

back of his hand. In a second the whole shower was pelting on him. He bent his head waiting for it to pass ; but the whole face of the day had changed—afar off he heard the dull rolling of thunder. He began to fidget. Carefully he stood up, crouching his back to the rain. He must not move, he might walk over the cliff ; besides, Conny would soon come seeking him. But, as if it had leaped through a great distance of space, the thunder suddenly crashed about him. " My God ! " he said, listening to its rolling off. " Conny, Conny," he then cried out, and anger and anxiety struggled in his throat. Again and again he started, feeling that lightnings were playing about him. And " Conny, Conny," he screamed between the thunderclaps.

Unexpectedly a hand, wet with rain, caught his, and a coarse voice, yet a woman's voice, said " Come." Hastily they made forward over the rough ground, so hastily indeed that soon his breath went from him, and in spite of the rain he grew hot and sweaty. " Stop a moment," he gasped ; " I'm bate out, 'tis long since I went so fast." He made to smile, but it flickered out at once, for he thought that he might be staring at a rock or tree. His hand had been dropped, and the stranger's silence stung him. " Do you see a little boy anywhere ? Dan Maher's little boy, Conny Maher ? "

" No," was the sullen answer.

" We'll go on," he said, bitterly ; his blindness had never so come home to him. The stranger again gripped his hand firmly, almost fiercely, and in the same headlong haste they made on through the pouring rain. " Oh, oh," he said, whenever the thunder burst ; but his helpmate kept her silence. And so he stumbled on, until his limbs were staggering and his heart thumping.

"If there's e'er a shelter anywhere, I could wait; Conny will be coming——"

"Where's the shelter?"

Drooping, he stood fetching short breaths: "You'll be all wet," he said.

"Where's the harrum in it?"

"I'm all right now," he said, and stretched out his useless hand once more.

When he found himself being dragged through some bushes he knew where he was.

"The road?" he said.

"Yes," came a gasping reply.

More swiftly now they stumbled down the hill. He was gaining hope, reckoning that his house could not be far off, when his hand was suddenly flung down, seized, and dropped again, and "Oh!" the voice cried, as if in terror, "there's someone coming," and the woman rushed from him. "Kitty, Kitty Regan, for God's sake——" he cried, all in a breath, his voice wild and high with surprise and despair, his hand glauming at nothing. Only with her last word had her own voice broken from her, letting him know whose hand had led him. Too late; there he stood, his empty hand stretched out, the rain drenching it. His father came panting up to him. "In the name of God, Shawn," he said, "how did 'oo come so far?"

"Whisht," said the blind man, struggling with his thought.

"'Tis a miracle from God, 'tis so," said the old man, and "Whisht, I'm telling ye," was again his son's savage reply.

II.

. . . . . .

That night John Donovan sat like a dazed man in the kitchen; and outside the rain poured and winds went by howling. His presence imposed silence on the room. Twice had the old man raised his head and whispered: "God pity them that's on the sea this night," and twice his son had scowled at him. At last the old people went off, leaving him alone. He lingered for a few minutes, then taking a pine-splinter, and lighting it at the turves, he went into the little back room, lit a candle, as if he could see by its light, pulled the curtain down from the window, and sat wearily on the edge of the bed. He struggled to keep calm, but hot sweat came out all over him. Then he went cold and shivered. Worn out from stress of emotion, he would yawn in sheer exhaustion, would endeavour to calm himself, to sit still, to smile. But he could not. He rose and moved about; sat down and rose again, while the storm grabbed at his little house as if it would sweep it bodily over the cliffs; and every other moment he would stretch his ear towards the window, listening, jerking his head quickly about like a bird's. At last, muttering, he removed his boots, and was standing upright when, as if he had heard a noise outside his window, he sprang forward, quenched the light with one quick slap, flung open the window, and thrust his head, his blind head, out into the storm, whispering wild and yearning words of invitation and love. But the night was empty of companionship.

Chilled and angry, he drew back and threw himself along the bed, and grabbed at the bedclothes, rocking himself to and fro, sobbing out the one word—No! No!—

over and over again, unwilling to confess defeat, unwilling to face the blank, loveless future. Yet in the end his words died away ; self-pity clothed him all over with the warmth of tears ; his passion ebbed, he slept.

The woman's sleep was different. Her they found next day, bedraggled, muddied, soaked, lying in a gully far back in the hills between Cuandor and Kilvonane, where her husband lived. She had been visiting her parents, had set off across the hills ; the storm had overtaken her, had waylaid her. Her hands were torn, and she bled from the brow ; she must have stumbled blindly on for many a mile in fright and fear. Perhaps she *had* skulked about John Donovan's house ; this, anyway, was what he meant to suggest when in the crowd of gossips that gathered in Lavelle's public-house discussing the event, he began to jest about the storm-birds that seek shelter from the storm at the lighthouse-keeper's window, how they do not have the courage to enter when the window is opened to them. The gossips could not understand ; they stared in wonder at his bitter lips, his stony eyes.

THE CRY.

If Jack Creedon did not get to where the road from Carrignadoura crosses the road to Aharas in time to catch up the mail car—well, he would have to walk the whole long ten miles into Raheen, to walk them every step instead of sitting, neighbour-like, on the car chatting to Larry O' the driver. With him Jack Creedon loved to chat—that is when Larry could be got to speak at all ; for the most part he spoke only to his horse.

It had been raining all day. Now, however, the sun had scattered the heavy rain-clouds, and there, behind them, lay a mass of shredded, tumbled, thin-drawn filaments and veils of vapour in which the coming sunset had already begun to heighten the tints. That brightness in the west was beautiful, indeed, after the dull day. Yet Jack Creedon gave it never a thought, unless perhaps to hope that it might have had an enlivening effect on Larry's crusty spirits.

And so he tramped and tramped the mountainy road ; and where the water-courses had made their own of its surface he splashed and splashed. All the time, however, he made up and up towards the crossing of the main roads on the ridge.

Above an edge of the hill he presently saw the tail-board of Larry's car ; the car was not moving, a thing that made him wonder. And soon he saw Larry himself, a little away from his horse, stamping about on the watery road. His hands were deep in his pockets, his whip was gripped under his elbow, and his face was looking more crusty

than ever. There he was stamping about on the mountain-top, impatience itself. A twinkle came into Jack Creedon's eye. He could make no guess at what was causing Larry to delay in so windy a spot after driving through miles of rain; he did not try to guess; the vision before him was sufficient, he enjoyed it, and he knew he would treasure it up in his memory. He raised his voice:

"Eh!" he cried, "is it taking the air ye are?"

Old Larry turned:

"The air!" he snarled.

"Ye might be civil!"

"Civil!"

"Is it anyone ye're waiting for?"

"Him!" Without taking his hands from his pockets Larry twisted himself until his whip pointed towards a series of step-like rocks that rose to a fine view-point. There Jack Creedon saw a well-dressed stranger staring intently over the steaming valley into the sunset. Its glare had caused him to put his hand above his eyes.

"Who is he?" whispered Jack.

"One of them tourists—lave me alone!"

Then Jack made a motion towards the car; would he mount? Larry surlily nodded; and without causing the crazy old thing to creak in a joint or spring, Jack Creedon got up on it and bided his time. Meanwhile old Larry stamped on the wet rocks.

The sunset soon parted with its glory; the sky grew cold and livid, the clouds became the colour and shape of dusky wings. Turning from it, the American silently made for his seat in the car. He took in the new passenger with a soft glance and slow nod.

Dusk thickened; night fell as they swung along the slopes of the interminable hills. They would climb

slowly up a long rise, the stroke of every hoof echoing from the rocks above their heads. Then, a quick change, they swung down the descent at a reckless pace, the car swaying from side to side.

And the darkness added to the mystery of it. Such a progress inebriates ; lull and excitement play with the mind and gradually shift it from old cares, old anchorages. Perhaps the mind of the American was undergoing such a change. Perhaps it was for this he had crossed the miles of foam. Still he never spoke. But Jack Creedon in his own slow way was putting two and two together. He was saying to himself that this indeed was a very silent traveller, a very queer sort of man to pay his money for so curious a pleasure, standing up on a windy point of rock while the sun set. It did not strike him that the sunset in a mountain valley might seem a very wonderful vision to one who had all his life seen it set amid sky-scrapers and factory chimneys. At the least, however, he understood that one who wishes to see the sun set would also very likely wish to see the moon rise ; and it was this thought that opened his mouth. But first it must be said that there are two roads by which you may enter Raheen. One is known as the Old Road, the other they call the Sea Road. The Sea Road is broad and new ; over the brows of great cliffs, along the edge of the sea, it winds, giving a succession of mighty views of great headlands and sweeps of sea-water. The Old Road, on the other hand, sneaks, as it were, into the quiet old village. It runs along by a little stream ; masses of tumbled rocks and slopes of heather are the only scenery to be viewed from it. The moon would be high and small before one caught a glimpse of it in such a place ; whereas from the Sea Road you might find it rising up like a glory from the heart of the waters.

"Larry," said Jack, "the gentleman would like to see the moon rising up beyond the sea."

Larry either didn't hear, or wouldn't hear. His voice startled the night:

"Whoa, girl!" he cried to his horse. "Whoa! Whoa!"

"Larry, what about taking the Sea Road to-night?"

"Whoa, girl, whoa?"

They rattled along, and soon the choice must be made; they must turn to the left and enter the darkness of the Old Road, or taking the right presently strike up into the sky. Jack Creedon must try again.

"You'll take the Sea Road to-night, Larry?" he coaxed softly, smiling at his own acting.

"Up! Up! Up, girl! Up! Up!" went Larry's voice, caressing the old horse he could feel but couldn't see at the end of the reins. His voice—there was such softness in it—puzzled Jack. It was not the voice of a man who was brooding on wrongs newly suffered. Had he forgotten that delay on the mountain-top?

"The moon will be rising any minute, and the gentleman here would like to see it; you'll take the Sea Road, Larry?" There was a certain challenging tone in the voice, and a challenge Larry had never shirked.

"I won't then—no, not if 'twas Bonyparty himself was sitting there besides you, my son!" he said.

For the first time the American spoke.

"If it makes the journey longer, or is harder on the horse, I'll take it into consideration." It was a stately little speech.

"Whoa! Ha-ick! Ha-ick!" cried Larry; he almost stopped the clatter of the hoofs; then he turned round towards the speaker and answered with equal deliberation:

"To-night is no different from any other night. Boy

and man, I'm coming this journey for over fifty years, and 'tisn't worth while to change—meaning no offence—go on, girl, go on!" He shook the reins.

Jack Creedon turned with some touch of resentment in his quick movement, but a restraining hand was laid on his arm; at the same moment they came to the divide, and without direction, as it seemed, the horse turned to the left; they were to sneak into Raheen by the Old Road.

The road fell away, down and down; and higher and higher the valley sides rose around them, so that soon they were driving headlong through a black darkness. As will happen in such surroundings they sank, all three, into deep silence. Hour after hour appeared to go by and Raheen seemed no nearer.

The horse suddenly stopped. Not a word had been spoken. Not a word was now spoken. The American heard the driver getting down. What was happening? For a moment he felt some touch of coldness and fear. Then he, too, got down. As he did so, his companion collided with him.

"Oh!" he said, with a start.

"One minute," he heard Jack Creedon's voice and he felt himself being pushed aside, "stand there as you are!" and then he knew that Jack Creedon had flung a stone against a great heap of stones that rose like a wall at their side. Then it appeared that the driver had done the same, for again there was the same sound of falling and slipping stones. What did it mean?

"What about yourself, sir?" came Larry's voice, and the stranger felt a fair-sized stone being pushed into his hand.

"Just fling it from you straight ahead and say: 'May Eternal Light shine upon him!'"

"Eternal Light on whom? What for?" questioned the American quickly.

"Tell him!" said old Larry, again as cranky as ever.

"You don't know, sir," said Jack Creedon, "that you're at the Croppy's grave— and that 'tis the custom to do what Larry is after saying."

"Oh!" said the quiet, foreign voice, and he flung his stone upon the cairn.

"Up, boys," said Larry. He was already up himself. They were swinging along again.

"Who was he? Who's buried there?"

"Who knows?—not man nor mortal could tell you that; the oldest man in the world couldn't tell you, not to mind me; but whoever he was we all give him the stones and the prayers, because our fathers before us gave them; and sure if he didn't deserve them he wouldn't be getting them, and the thing he done must have been a great thing, and his sufferings must have been great sufferings. He lies in a lonely place."

So spoke Jack Creedon, not witting that old Larry's ear was on the stretch. But he knew of it in a moment, for Larry's voice was in the night:

"Do you hear him? Do you hear him, sir? and he wanting me only a moment ago to take the Sea Road, wanting me to go staring at the moon and its grandeur, and leave the poor Croppy there in his loneliness," and then as if the thought he had kept so long to himself had at last overwhelmed him, had swept him free of his surroundings, he cried out in a sort of wail that trembled with the earnestness of faith, cried so loud that his voice filled all the lonely darkness:

"But old Larry didn't forget you, me poor Croppy. Larry didn't forget you, though the gold of America was shlipping into his hand." His voice went far back

into the silent hills and caverns before it died. It seemed long until they heard the horse's hoofs again.

. . . . . .

The American told me this story himself, as much as he knew, when we were in the middle of a discussion as to the power of great singers and great actors to move you.

"I don't say I was MOVED," he said, "by that cry of faith in the night—I was CLEANSED, as by fire!"

THE BREATH OF LIFE.

The opera company which I had accompanied as first violinist on so many tours suddenly collapsing, I found myself rather unexpectedly out of an engagement. I communicated with my society, and after a day's delay I was ordered to go at once to Clonmoyle.

I was in the worst of humours. Clonmoyle I found was one of those places in Ireland which instead of increasing in size and importance as places ought, seem to have become accustomed to doing the very opposite. Once a city, it was now but a straggling town. What had brought an opera company to try its fortunes there I could make no guess at, yet there it was, and with difficulties accumulating about it. Here was I myself, for instance, in Clonmoyle because the manager had found it impossible to supplement his scanty travelling orchestra with local players ; and several others as well as I had had to travel day and night to be in time for the opening performance. Only one local musician had been dug up ; and of him this story.

In everything he stood apart from us. He was old, well over sixty, however young in appearance. He was large and heavy in build, easy-going, ruminative. We, the others in the band, were rather meagre, high-strung, irritable, worried—as is the way of our tribe ; on this trip particularly so (consider my own case : a first-class violinist in such surroundings !) He, on the other hand, smiled the whole day long, and his voice whispered rather than spoke. It did not seem to trouble him that the old

ramshackle theatre was mouldy, damp, foul-smelling. He did not seem to notice the cruel draughts that swept us while we played, and benumbed our fingers. It made no difference to him if the manager was in a vile temper over the receipts, and our conductor still worse, his rheumatism playing old Harry with him.

At our very first rehearsal I discovered he could not play in tune. " I'm in for it ! " I said, for a week of such fellowship I knew only too well would leave me a wreck. And even as I said this I saw the conductor staring hard at where the two of us were sitting side by side ; was it possible he thought it was I who was playing like that ! He might well have thought so, for my companion's face was not a guilty face ; how anyone could play so consistently flat and still smile was a problem beyond me. Yes, Ignatius O'Byrne, such was his name, still smiled and still flattened. The fact is, he was the happiest man alive ; it was as if he had come into an inheritance. Here he was fiddling away in his beloved operas, and it was thirty years since he had last done so. These long thirty years, he explained to me in an interval, he had been rehearsing them in his untidy lodgings in a back street, and more than that, he had been thinking them out, phrase by phrase, " walking in the mists upon these rain-soaked hills "—I give his very words. As he spoke he swept his hand in a half-circle as if even there in the theatre he could still behold them, the dreary hills that surround Clonmoyle on every side and overlay it, as it were, with a sort of perpetual gloom. And then he added : " Behind music is the breath of life." A curious man, surely ; I watched his face. It was glowing, glowing, as long as the music held. And once when in some happy passage the whole band was singing like one, " Bravo, Bravo ! " I heard him whisper, and later on " Bravissimo ! " and he

ceased playing, ceased, until I thought of nudging him with my elbow. And so, little by little, I came to forgive him his flat playing and his awkward bowing.

Our conductor, a brute of a man, his body twisted into a knot by rheumatism, was now constantly looking in our direction ; but whenever I saw him doing so I would make my violin sing for all it was worth ; were we not brothers in the same craft, this old man and I ? At rehearsal the second day my efforts to cover his wretched playing failed ; the conductor left his place, tied up and all as he was in that knot of pain, shuffled over to where we sat, and stood between us ! That settled for him which of us two was playing flat. He scowled at the old resurrected musician, hissed out a fierce, wicked word under his breath, and hobbled back to his place. That night, just to make matters worse, I suppose, old Byrne played altogether vilely ! He had scarce a phrase in tune. When the curtain fell he had to face a little tragic opera of his own—the tragedy of old age and failing powers. He took it all without a word. " The breath of life is behind music," he whispered to me as he came from the interview ; then he bent down, carefully wrapped his fiddle in a piece of baize cloth, put it in his case and made off.

The final explosion came at the rehearsal next day. He and I were the first to arrive. The score of last night's opera, it was the " Marriage of Figaro," still lay on the conductor's stand. He turned the pages. They were pencilled all over with directions as to the tempos of the various movements. Along these pencillings old Byrne ran his finger. I could see he was having his revenge. I could see him lift his brows—just a little—as if he were partly amused, partly astonished. But no word escaped him. Soon the conductor came in and we

began. We had not got far when we heard "Get out!" roared in a terrible voice, the voice of one who had not slept for several nights. The old man rose up, wrapped his baize cloth around his instrument, and moved between the chairs. As he went how still the house was, only a chair moving, and his own almost silent feet! And how we watched him! But when he got as far as the conductor's chair he paused, glanced once more at the open score, once again ran his finger along the pencillings, and laughed a tiny little laugh!

I felt his going more than I should care to tell. Will you believe me? I had told that old musician, that stranger, the whole story of the sorrows of my life. Yes, I told him things I had hardly ever made clear even to myself! And he replied: "Is it not behind music, the breath of life?" as if sorrow was there for the one purpose of being transmuted into sweet sound! I recalled his words as I went to my task that night.

And that night the extraordinary thing happened; our conductor failed to make an appearance: his rheumatism had conquered. There was then a call for our leader. He was found. Alas, he was not in a condition to conduct anything. He could scarcely stand. And he became quite cross about it; we had to leave him there in his corner, resining his bow like anything and scowling like mad. What between principals, chorus, and band, all thinking they stood a chance of losing a night's pay, and the manager flustering about like a whirlwind, our little den beneath the stage was deafening; I slipped quietly out into the house. There outside the rail was old Byrne! "What's the matter?" he whispered. As I told him, up came the manager.

"Mr. Melton," he said to me, "will you please take the baton to-night?"

A very flattering compliment, indeed, and I should have taken that baton if our band did not happen to be the scraggiest ever scraped together from the ends of the earth ; our leader was in the condition I have mentioned. As we spoke I saw the players getting into their places, a tempting sight, yet still I hesitated, foreseeing collapse and ignominy.

" It is not possible," I began, but over the rail old Byrne was climbing like a boy. He had clutched the baton from the manager's hand. He had leaped into the conductor's chair. He gave but one glance to the right, to the left. " Now, boys," he said, and at the words we swam, sank, buried ourselves in the rich, broad, gentle strains of the overture to " Faust." Some wide gesture he had used, some thrill in his tone had bidden us to do so—to lose ourselves in the soul of the music. At the first chord we had got within the skin of it, as the saying is. And never was the mood broken ; every progression told, and not a colour tone was faulty or blurred. That memorable waltz, which use has almost spoiled, he made a new thing of it—we were all spirits in thin air, so lightly it went. But our triumph was the tremendous trio at the close. The old man stood up to it, hiding the stage from a large sector of the house. What did he care! We felt his huge shabby figure above us as a darkness, a vastness of great potency. It commanded stage, orchestra, house, with a strong yet benign power. The voices, tenor, soprano, bass—all the instruments, strings, brass, wood, drums, the very shell of the old house itself, became as one instrument and sang the great strain with such strength and perfection that some of us trembled lest we should fall down with excitement and spoil everything.

" Oh ! " we all sighed when it was over. For such

moments does the artist live. I was so glad I had told him the story of my sorrows!

Now, sir, around Clonmoyle, as I have said, is a rampart of dark hills, bleak and rain-sodden, treeless and desolate. Why do I again mention them? "Wherever did you learn to conduct?" I asked him, as we made for our lodgings.

"There!" he answered, and his outstretched hand gestured around the deserted hills, "behind music we must get at the breath of life." Bare, wind-swept hills!—curious place to find out the secrets of life! Or what did he mean by "Life!" It cannot be that the breath of life that is behind all great music is the sigh of loneliness?

"And you took him with the company?"

"No, sir; an opera company, like any other company must pay its way."

THE LADY OF THE GLASSY PALACE.

In the cross-hatched mass of lanes that lies in a corner of the city-valley she was known as the Lady; and to watch the high-heeled daintiness with which she threaded these lanes or her ceremonious buying of a ha'p'orth of milk or her dignified borrowing of a box-iron was to know why the sweet old name had been given her. Sometimes she was spoken of as the Lady of the Glassy Palace, for she was one of the many tenants of that huge old house. That huge old house, a sort of land-mark in the district, owes its name, in the first place to its porch—a dead weight of cement that gives quite an architectural gloom to the ever-open hallway; in the second place to the fact that in its every door the panels are of glass. In some of these the glass is gone, a well-rubbed, greasy showcard taking its place, or a sheet of tin, or a piece of packing-case lid, or the tail of an old skirt. But the panels of the Lady's door—it was on the first landing—were rich with transparencies—Alpine landscapes, very romantic in style, if somewhat blue and cold in atmosphere. Similarly treated was the door of the Kellys' room, her neighbours on the same landing. The Kellys, herself, and old Watchpole, a humorist who lived somewhere in the regions aloft, were the only settled lodgers, the others coming and going perpetually.

The Lady's hat, worn at an uncertain angle, was of black straw, its rim gapped and time-bitten. Her jacket and skirt were also black; the tail of the skirt, however, had become quite discoloured from repeated mud-

splashings, repeated brushings ; and the seams of the jacket had come open in spite of the fact that she was skeleton-thin. Her shoes let the rain water in and out. Yet the dullest saw and remembered how different she was from her neighbours—her fat, bedraggled, drink-loving, merry, careless neighbours. They liked her—those easy souls—she was so quaint ; and if they joked her on occasions saying : " Ah, Miss Neligan, you're full of pride," it was only to hear her answer : " If I am 'twas born with me." Besides, they pitied her : her health was so poor.

After her day's work in the ready-made clothing factory she came in one November evening—a warm, damp evening when the handrail of the stairs was oozy and little flakes of black mud clung to the steps—and had gone up only a little way from the grimy hall when she was overtaken by old Watchpole. As he passed he must have noticed her short breathing, for having got beyond the landing he bent over the rail and called to her : " Miss Neligan, going down in the world is easier than getting up . . . 'tis you and me knows that." Her answer was that wan smile of hers which always ended, God help us ! in a drawing together of her little lips, as if still she awaited some Prince Charming to step up to her and kiss her.

At her own door she paused irresolutely ; tired as she was and anxious for rest she had suddenly recollected that a few words remained to be said. Turning from it, she tapped at the Kellys' door. Mrs. Kelly, fat, slovenly, hot-looking, opened. The Lady said sweetly :

" How did the case go ? "

Mrs. Kelly gestured, scattered her enemies to the winds :

" Thrun out," she answered, " thrun out, body and bones."

" Ah," said the Lady, " I'm so glad."

" Dismissed ! That's the satisfaction they got, with their lawyer and all, if you please, and us with ne'er a wan at all, ne'er a wan at all to say a word in our defence !"

" I'm so glad," Miss Neligan repeated.

" Yes, his worship told them up to their face that he didn't believe wan word of what they wor saying."

" Ah ! "

" But isn't it the pity of the world we can't enjoy it as we'd like to ? "

" Poor Nonie isn't improving then ? "

" No then ; backward she's going. And 'tis hot-foot the news would be carried in to her if we had a bit of a racket here to-night. And humour her we must."

Poor Nonie was Mrs. Kelly's mother-in-law. She lay stretched on her dying-bed in St. Mary's Ward of the Union, while the two branches of her kinsfolk fought battles on her behalf in the Police Court. The whole case arose out of a remark overheard in a public house : " Better than her were after dying there "—namely in the Union. Who said it ? The Kellys of the Alley (an unnamed passage between Billiard Lane and Squeeze's Lane) attributed the words to the Kellys of the Glassy Palace. These as indignantly denied : it was easy to know where the remark came from : what made the Alley so anxious to excuse itself ? A royal fight and several cross-summonses were the result.

" Well," said the Lady, turning to her own door, " I'd be the last in the world to prevent people enjoying themselves, but 'tisn't everyone can stand a racket in the next room to them."

" You needn't be afraid ; little racket or noise we'll have here to-night, with God's help. A few friends may call in and go away again ; but I promise you, Miss

Neligan, 'tis little complaint you'll have to make in the morning." Then the soul of honour added : " 'Twouldn't do, you know, and poor Nonie dying on us."

No one could complain of the jubilation. Friends did come, did not go. Coal-porters with husky voices and bleared eyes wiped their mouths on shining coat sleeves ; market women with florid faces and heavy earrings lifted their glasses saying : " Here's to you, ma'am," in the same solemn tone they use when praying for the souls departed. But everything was quiet, nicely decorous. If poor Nonie were dead and laid out in the room there would have been more noise and laughter. For all that, there was fun enough ; and the silence under which it had to be carried on, for the enemy was everywhere, only added relish to it. Mick Hosford's monkey-trick—he caught an apron string between his teeth and jumped about on all fours—certainly gained by it. But when, cramped from his posture, he suddenly stood upright and, in a fit of recklessness, danced a bit of a spatter on the hearthstone there was an indignant " Sh ! " which the lady of the house excused, saying : " You'll pardon us, Mick, but you see how we're situated."

The visitors—there were ten of them—sat for the most part on the beds ; behind them in the warm shadows the four youngest children slept in their clothes—soundly, although you could hear the rickety bed-frames creaking and groaning when a fit of smothered laughter took the company.

Midnight had come and gone. The stillness of the small hours began to creep into the revel. Only an odd footstep sounded now along the lane ; then a snatch of song or music, or a scream would come from far away, and the puff-puff of a gas-engine ; but for the most part the underworld slept. The talk had drifted to the lane's

ghost—in every one of these lanes a spirit walks abroad, not without reason, say those who ought to know—and a mild-featured young man was emphatically declaring that he believed every word of it, when Bridgie Brogan suddenly went queer and cried out: "Look! Look!" and pointed through the window. They gathered to it. Beyond a jumble of roofs and sheds was a stretch of black-looking wall. Making stealthily along its top they saw a crouching, balancing figure: silhouetted against a lighted white-washed wall beyond, the limbs mammoth-like and awkward, he seemed to sprawl along the air. Crowded at the window they watched his antics until Mrs. Kelly succeeded in getting a glance.

"'Tis only Hawky Sullivan," she said, in a tone of flat disappointment.

"Where is he going?" they asked.

"Home! often and often I seen him doing the like."

"How is he going home?"

"He'll drop into Billiard Lane."

They understood; yet they continued to watch him in silence. It was impossible to put it out of one's head that he was not being pursued, or at least on some evil errand. Mrs. Kelly was the first to turn away. In the silence, she says, she distinctly heard the Lady give one or two snores out of her. Then, Crash! And then another moment of silence. Mrs. Kelly rushed at the people that were still clung to the window, tearing at their backs. She made them responsible for the crash.

"Who done it, who done it?" she cried, wild with indignation. The children, awakened, began to howl; she rushed to them. "Mother! Mother!" they were wailing, not knowing themselves why they were crying. The tiptoe knot of people at the window never stirred.

"Who done it?" she cried again, pulling at them. They gave her no attention. She tugged at them in vain. She heard: "He will," "He won't," "He can't," "No," then a long "Ah!" and she caught sight of Hawky Sullivan in the distance, leaping wildly from the wall. The sudden crash had terrified him.

"You nearly killed him," said a woman's voice; but when Mick Hosford, the accused, turned into the room, a smile of great modesty was on his face. He had simply thrust a large earthenware pan through the window and let it fall crashing on the concreted yard below. And what confusion it had caused!

"'Twill be all right," he comforted Mrs. Kelly, who, sitting on the edge of the bed, was weeping copiously to think how the story would be surely taken in to poor Nonie and she on her dying bed!

It happened that old Watchpole aloft in his garret had also been looking at Hawky Sullivan doing the midnight cat. But to him the sight was nothing new. It was the sudden crash, the crying children, Mrs. Kelly's excited voice and Hawky's obvious terror that caught at his imagination. His mind struggled, yet failed to put two and two together. He opened his door and leaned an ear to the staircase. He heard weeping. "There's something up," he whispered. Again he stretched his ear. There was silence; had they heard his door open? "They can't all have gone," he said. He had to descend. Yet he paused once more to question what it all meant. He grew suddenly so creepy that he had enough to do to keep himself from rushing down the stairs and into the Kellys' room. He controlled himself. He would knock and say: "Did ye hear e'er a noise—what was it in God's name?" Yes! and he glided down the stairs. Just as he groped

for the knob of the Kellys' door he paused. Would he inquire? He looked about. The Lady's door was open. A street lamp threw its beams on her ceiling—it was the first thing he noticed. The room glimmered. His eyes glanced up and down. Across her threshold, at his very feet, he suddenly saw there was a huddled mass —white, but scarfed and folded in black—the black foldings seeming to torture it. His hair stood up. He grabbed the Kellys' door, flung it open, had a momentary sense of relief in the light, in the many faces around him. But he could not speak: his jawbone was held as in a vice. His mouth was wooden. His left hand pointed through the doorway; his right wheeled in the air.

"Ketch him, ketch him," cried Mrs. Kelly, in a toneless voice. Jack Ruddy caught him, as if he would smother a fire in him; and the poor creature, feeling the comfortable delight of safety, gasped out: "The Lady!" "The Lady!" Jack Ruddy still held him, awaiting orders. Mrs. Kelly, who loved her neighbour, darted for the door.

"The lamp," she cried, "the lamp; my God! my God!" and she stood with her back to them all: what was she staring at like that? Ruddy released his burden and made with the lamp for the door. He held it low. Five of them were now bent upon the senseless mass. A woman was whispering: "God! God! God!" without pause or stop, in some dim perception of the pity of it all. Mrs. Kelly was rubbing one of the fleshless hands of the prostrate woman. Mrs. Lane, with great gentleness, was needlessly putting a wisp of hair back from the rigid eyes. "She's happier than ever she was in this place," said Jack Ruddy, lifting himself up; then they all knew that the Lady was dead.

Of course Watchpole found humour in it, but not for a few days. In this way he now begins the tale: "Did ye ever hear tell of how Mick Hosford kilt two birds with the wan stone?" As a matter of fact he killed only one, though, at the wake, Hawky Sullivan did conduct himself with the reserve that befits one who has had a narrow escape.

THE BONNY LABOURING BOY.

"'Tis him!" said Tim Lehane, the mason, and a look of blessed relief spread on his face. The temper he had been in all that day had just reached the point where words are of no avail. And then came the sudden change, "'Tis him!" and a sigh of relief.

He had been quarrelling with the labourer, a man anyone would quarrel with, for he was dull and slow and awkward. And to-day he was limp as well as slow: while curses fell thick around him, he went on silently bringing up the stones and mixing the mortar, his eye bent on his task, or suddenly striking around, as if he were expecting a call. He might as well have been deaf and dumb for all the signs he gave of annoyance. It was not, however, the silence of defiance; the fact was there was not a trace of manhood left in him, and this of itself was sufficient to bring out all the temper of Lehane, the mason. "If there was anything the matter with him why couldn't he say so," he growled, soothing the conscientious doubt that would assail him. No—there was nothing wrong with him; all this passion was necessary just to keep the man alive. The quarrelling had gone on so continuously, that now, almost six o'clock, the mason felt not alone crusty and fiery in spirit, but in some manner defeated. He would so like to take out that stupid labourer, Johnny Walsh, and bash him about the face. That would be an end, anyway; and relief would follow. Relief came, but in a different way. Glancing down through the scaffolding, he had seen the old, well-clad, bent back

of the grocer, for whom the house was being built. "'Tis him!" he cried, and flourished his trowel in the air to let the others know. They answered his signal, they all knew such a visit meant a substantial tip for drink. The drinking would be the lustier for the day of storm they had all gone through.

Mason and grocer went together about the building, the latter poking half-surreptitiously at the wet walls with the point of his umbrella. "That's a good stone?" he would question, nervously, and the mason would take up a spall of it and ring it with his trowel. "A nate little stone!" he'd reply carelessly, as if it wasn't a thing that needed assertion. The sound of it under the trowel should convince anyone. The inspection finished at the footings, as Lehane called the foundations. Then the grocer went off, highly pleased with himself. Passing the labourer, who was mechanically mixing some mortar, "I'm after leaving something with himself, he'll share it," he said. The labourer raised his joyless, dull eyes. There was but little comprehension in them. "With the mason," repeated the house-builder, nodding significantly. "Thank ye, sir!" then replied Johnny Walsh, "'tis badly wanted." A dull flame began to burn in the eyes that had been so listless the livelong day.

As six o'clock rang out, he threw down his shovel, and with some alertness made for his coat. And once more he looked up and down the road, as if he feared a sudden call away.

The half-dozen men left the job in a body. All disputes had vanished at the touch of the silver. Down to Miss Julia's they went, not without much joking, the mason applying the words: "A nate little stone!" to everything they passed by—house, horse, man, child. In Miss Julia's they made their own of the comfortable little

room : it was not unlike a ship's cabin : ceiling and all were sheeted with pitch-pine, and old age had darkened and mellowed the varnish. Then there were a white deal table and a good fire. They flung themselves noisily along the benches and lit pipes. And soon the drink was brought in.

The men stared at it. The labourer, as well as the others, had felt a great access of daring come to him, he had not, however, up till this shared in their merriment ; but the dull fire in his eyes was growing steadier : a touch of recklessness had come into them. Everything would be quite well and merry—if only he could keep awake until he had drunk his share of the half-crown. He was afraid of sleep overtaking him in this snug, cabin-like room ; it was now several nights since he had a proper rest. Rest was what he had been all day longing for. One thing else he was afraid of : that someone would suddenly stick an excited head in at the door, crying out : " Johnny, come home out of that, quick, quick." Only for this double fear he would do as the others had begun to do—settle down for a long night of it. As it was, he furtively gulped down his glass. The others looked at him ; was he keeping up the quarrel ? why was he so silent ? Almost as they looked at him his eyes shut. He was fast asleep.

They left him so ; they turned and invited Lehane to continue his story of the dog fight. " The dog was rubbed," he was saying, " I knew it be the smell. And it was Micky Screw rubbed him. I knew that, too. ' Look here,' says I, ' if 'tis a fact I find any poison on that dog's mouth, any poison whatsoever ' "—and the story went on. The men leant back in their seats, their heads quizzically on one side. They smoked slowly, their drinks remained almost untouched, the

night was long. And the mason made up his mind to give every detail of the memorable fight. " At the first going off, Tiger caught him be the neck, fair and clane ! "

" Go on ! " a voice said in admiration.

" Fair and clane, a crippling grip—" the mason looked around ; there was Johnny Walsh's head hanging down invitingly, the nose almost touching the table, " like that," cried the mason, and he clutched the sleeper's head, " and he pressed home, he did, and down, and down," and as he spoke he bent the suffocating Johnny's head down and down. " Leave me up," he sputtered, while the others gaped in silence, taking no notice, " but 'twas no use for him, a tremor went through him—that was the poison, you know, acting, acting, but still he wouldn't leave go, he was that spunky, he kept him down, down until —"

The words stopped. A rather tall, fattish woman squeezed her way into the snuggery, there were others behind her, and all were looking excited. The first woman was trying both to tidy her hair and to arrange her shawl at the one moment. She was steaming with sweat. " In the Name of God what are ye doing to that misfortunate creature ? " she cried loudly, " Come home, Johnny, come home and hurry ; 'tis home long ago you'd be this night and you were a proper man at all ; but God help us 'tis trouble enough you have, without me adding to it." Her arm was stretched out, as if to catch him and bring him along.

The stricken man rose, cap in hand. Somehow as he went through the door he managed to turn round and say in a shame-faced sort of way to those he was leaving : " Herself, the wife's dead—I must be— " as an ending he jerked his cap in the direction of the waiting, excited group of women, and shut the door behind him.

In the death-room he found many women seated

comfortably ; they had done their part. A sheet had been hung against the foul, discoloured wall, and to it bouquets of paper roses had been pinned. On the breast of the corpse there was a scraggy bunch of real flowers, some with long stems, others cut quite short. Four candlesticks stood on cheap dinner plates. The husband noticed these things as he knelt in prayer. One old woman would indirectly comfort him. " He ought to be the happy man to think she had everything she wanted at the end," and some other woman with a bitter voice answered : " Well, indeed, 'twasn't much Johnny ever left her short—but 'twas a pity all the same he didn't come home after his day's work, and she lingering on and on, maybe wanting to say something to him."

He pretended not to hear. He could feel his neck hot and sore where the mason had gripped him, and that final indignity he thought of somehow as an offset to his having gone drinking instead of making homewards as he had promised.

That night there was a great roar in Miss Julia's taproom. They were all singing " The Bonny Labouring Boy."

And when his work is over
'Tis home he goes with joy,
And happy is the girl gets
A bonny labouring boy !

THE SPANCELED.

The pair of them, spanceled in two such different ways, met, or rather slipped into acquaintanceship in the most haphazard way in Mike Larrymore's meadow-land. As to her: if you saw only her brow and eyes—so shapely, so guileless, open, clear—your heart would pity her because of her burden; but when you marked the shapeless jaw and mouth—the upper lip, long, full, protruding, the lower dragged a little to one side, as by some influence of the retreating chin—you could not but reflect that, after all, the man, her husband, who on his death-bed spanceled her so effectually with a few lines in his will, might have had his own thought in doing so. Upper and lower face so different, the general effect was strange and uncertain—shyness, wildness, passion seemed to be continually deepening or softening, one into another.

The day her husband, Pat Lenihan, was laid in Kilvurrish, they say she smiled. Her six long years of drudgery were over. Henceforth if she stayed up all night to see that the sow didn't smother her young, or if her day's work happened to be in a dripping mountainy field, clearing it of stones, her wages when the task was done would not be the bitter word of a consumptive who, finding life slipping from him, spent his days in gazing with his hopeless eyes on the three children that played about the earthy floor—in gazing on them, thinking what would happen when he was gone. Quiet enough he died, singing old tunes in a sort of stupor that at the end

came to comfort him. Then the biteen of land on the steep-down, rock-strewn hillside was hers; and she was still strong, young, and not uncomely. But if she smiled on that wild wintry day while he was being laid in Kilvurrish, the grave-diggers looking quite black and huge in the sombre sunset, she had not then learnt the terms of the will. That same night when she came to know them she flung his relations from the door, bolted it, and standing in the middle of the turf-lit room, looked wildly from one child to another, as if they were the offspring of some other woman; for the will made it clear that the land would pass to them on her marrying again.

The shock wore off; indeed the time was not long coming when the few neighbours she knew—the Larrymores, for instance—would make many a half-hidden joke about how she was spanceled. Freely they laid snares for her: "Come in here, Maggie," Mrs. Larrymore would say, "I have as fine a bit of homespun as ever ye seen," and instead of the bit of woollen would be a young and unsuspecting labouring-boy, who would blush and cover half his face with his hand. "Isn't he grand," they'd say, "and nothing to hinder him—or you." Simple traps, yet again and again she fell into them. What did it matter when she knew that the young man would learn the story of her life as soon as her back was turned? Thus her very safeguard became in a manner her temptation.

Now, as to the spanceled man who was to meet this spanceled woman: John Keegan his name was. In a far-off parish he was known far and wide as the grabber's nephew. If he were a grabber's son persecution would have been so hard and constant against him that he might have grown up a man of will, a powerful man; the tree, they say, is strengthened by the

storm. As it was, he grew up in an atmosphere of distrust rather than enmity. Of course this distrust did often pass into enmity, often became total boycott; but on the falling of the political weather-glass he would quickly slip back again into acquaintanceship with such of the young men as were of a character to feel warm elation in forgiving their country's enemies over a few drinks. Thus be became sly, crafty in his knowledge of human nature: he got into the habit of examining every new face he had to speak with; finally he came to know his own power. He discovered distant public-houses, where he found himself mistaken for relatives of the same name—men of spotless character. And soon, of course, he knew how exactly to set gossip on false scents; and found a certain pleasure in watching the faces of his pot-house companions as they traced curious relationships between himself and his own father, between himself and himself! Lower and lower he sank; yet from all this a good girl would have, at least might have, rescued him if the bit of grabbed land had not stood in the way. From bad to worse it went; derelict, it came at last to hang like a millstone around the grabber's neck; it drove him to drink. Then the nephew became a spalpeen, a roving labourer; but in all his wanderings he kept as a light in his heart the thought that he would yet be master of Gurteenruadh, would yet be in a position to ask in marriage someone who would not look at a spalpeen. But that day might yet be far off; meantime he was but a spalpeen, an unsettled man. Thus he, too, was in the way of temptation; he was spanceled to a bit of grabbed land in a boggy valley, as the woman to a bit of rocky soil on a steep-down hillside

All in two days their intimacy came about. Mike Larrymore had his grass in the inches by the river: his

fear was that the water would rise and sweep away his cocks: in years that did not seem any wetter than this it had happened. At last came a day of sunshiny wind and, Sunday though it was, men and horses were sent into the fields to get in the grass. Carts of people returning from Mass upon the road that dipped in festoons midway along the hillside, would pull up, and a man or two would scramble down through the furze, take off their coats, and ask for a fork. The stranger, John Keegan, slid down through the furze-brake in the same uninvited manner and began to work. That night he slept with the other labouring-boys in the barn. Next day he was at work again, the widow by his side, both of them gleaning with long rakes in a far part of the field, and that night he sat in the farmer's kitchen and took a hand at the cards. Whatever else he could do, he was confident of his skill at cards. His merry, never-resting tongue showed as much. It rattled on and on, and whether he won or lost he had his joke. There was scarcely a card in the pack for which he had not some pet name: "my little do-een"—that is "my little two," "my little ace-een" were expressions they all began presently to use, as also his use of "old lady" for the queen of hearts. The widow was playing too, in her silent way, uninterested, slow; she lost game after game. They had often to call out to her to play, or to hand her the pack with the one word "deal." She was watching the stranger. Other eyes were watching him also, but with far different thoughts. It is a great card-playing district; and they began to resent the stranger's winning of almost every trick. His high spirits vexed them too. He would need to be reminded of his position. Not by the women, however; they took his side in the battle that had not yet declared itself. They saw no reason why a game of

cards should be so solemn and quiet: wasn't it for fun they were at them at all? Playing silently, the widow did not seem to care whether or not her brooding on the thought of the stranger's presence was noticed. She had much to think about. That day in the field he had poured all the sorrows of his life into her ear, apparently for no purpose except to relieve his mind. And only the bare truths of his life he told her; in a vibrant voice, however, tender and rich. And she was on the point of doing as much herself; but her mouth dried up and she could not speak. Now she was sorry. Never before had she had any thought that such a confession could bring her comfort. Maybe to-morrow she would do what she had failed to do to-day. And as she watched him she was experiencing the solace of self-accusation; so that the sallies of his wit, which made the others laugh out, some of the men against their will it seemed, were powerless over her; she scarce gathered their meaning. Presently she caught Jack Constantine looking at her, making signs to her, nodding and winking, pointing to her cards. Her face was a blank. All she could gather from his signs was that he was suspicious of something in the play. His eyes were hard and fiery, and whenever the stranger played, Jack stretched out his arm and felt the card with his fingers, as if the sense of sight of itself was not sufficient to make out its value. Suddenly he jumped up and leaned right across the table, looking down at the stranger. "Stand up," he yelled—the voice of one who has been a long time smothering his rage.

"What—what?"

"Stand up, will 'oo?"

"Why? For what?—what are you saying?"

"Stand up when you're tolt."

Others began to rise up also. "Sit down, Jack."

"Take it aisy." "Don't spoil sport." "What's up with ye at all?"—the voices broke in from right and left, some of them, however, not over-earnest in the peace-making.

"He's sitting on a card. I'm after seeing it. 'Tisn't fair; we're not fools," Jack Constantine spluttered out to them, though his eyes seemed incapable of swerving for a moment from the man he was watching.

The stranger shuffled and stood up. As he did so, all the cards in his hand fell to the ground. There was no card on his chair.

"That's it," Jack cried, lying right across the table and pointing to a card on the floor.

"'Twas in me hand."

"'Twas not in your hand."

"'Twas."

"'Twasn't."

"Maybe 'tis cheating I am?"

"'Tis."

"I'm not."

"You are."

"You needn't believe me."

"Who'd believe you—a grabber." The stranger collapsed.

"All right," he said, and rose and made for the door.

"You're not going?" said Mike Larrymore, rising also; he was afraid a mistake had been made: Jack Constantine was always a hot-headed man.

"I'm after being insulted."

"'Tis only a bit of temper."

"I'm no grabber, nor the son of wan."

"No, only the nephew," Jack's voice yelled out; he was in the midst of a whirl of inquiries.

They saw how the light of the kitchen lamp caught the

stranger's back for a step or two ; then he was gone. Mike Larrymore made for the door.

" You should be more careful, Jack," he said, following the stranger, " the man has given his labour."

Then Constantine gave in detail how he had come at the man's history. The widow listened. How strange it was that she should have heard it all before ! No circumstance was different. Again there came over her a wave of warm sorrow that she had not told the man her whole history : somehow it would have comforted her to know that he in his homeless wanderings could sometimes think of her. Around her she heard them talking of his story and his relations ; and it seemed to her that they had no right to do so, that they did not know him at all.

Mike Larrymore returned. He told them he couldn't get the stranger to stay : " He's gone wesht," he said. " Wan like him," a woman said, " 'tis in his nature to be wandering about."

" Something like that he's after saying himself ; though 'twas hard put I was to make out what he was saying, down in his throat the talking was."

They made an effort to renew the game ; but the women had gathered about the fire ; and every now and then one of them would turn to the players with an inquiry : " Bill, didn't you know Mike Pat Casey, who was an uncle to Dr. Casey of Lisheenaglass ?" or something like that. All the time the widow's thought was full of a lonely man going west into the heart of the hills.

" Willy, is the moon up ? " she asked at last out of her stupor. Willy laughed.

" What ails you, Maggie ? " he said, " 'tis after coming round by this time."

"I'll be going," she said. The moon would take her safely across the stepping-stones.

When she reached the other side of the river, had entered, as it were, her own lonely land, she stood still for a moment in utter confusion, the very landscape seemed unfamiliar. "Oh! Oh! Oh!" she moaned, and drew her black shawl close about her and swayed to and fro. Then a sort of calmness suddenly fell on her, and almost without a thought in her head she went up the zig-zag path. Presently she came on her little patch of oats, and then above her she could see her little house: in the moonlight the long, low, white-washed wall, seen through the slender birch and rowan trunks, might have been a line of clothes. Suddenly she noticed that the lamp was not in its usual place; she knew as much by the dulness of the window. In these houses the lamps always shine out exactly at the same angle. She hastened, vague thoughts of her children having risen from their beds chilling her. But the silence reassured her. Before entering she paused, and her eyes were towards the west.

Opening the door she saw the stranger, Keegan, half-rising from a stool to meet her.

"Sh!" he said, noting her astonishment, and pointed to the settle. There lay her youngest child, wrapped in a heap of bed-clothes. "'Twas crying," he whispered. She gave no heed to his words. She stared at him with frightened eyes: in her brain a lonely figure was still trudging along the roads. To her surprise this man before her had again seated himself, and with no confusion, by the settle, and was now arranging the disordered mass of clothes. She withdrew quickly through the open door. One glance he shot after her; then with a slow smile he bent again upon the infant. A rustle made him look about. She had returned, was crouching as far from him

as possible, in her hand a crazy-looking gun held awkwardly.

" Go on out," she murmured, with no strength in her voice. In a leap his arms were about her, the gun falling with a rattle on the earthen floor. He heard it, half-stooped to seize it; then something made him glance at the woman's face. Her eyes were shut, the mouth wide open and panting; he felt her whole body trembling from head to foot. As if in very pity he kissed her, babbling old-fashioned love-words at her ear.

And so they leaped from their pit of sorrow, as the spanceled will until time be over; in no other way is it possible for them—this is their philosophy—to revenge themselves on fortune, to give scorn for scorn.

SOLACE.

TIME: THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

When Eoghan Mor O'Donovan, poet, stooped down and came in over his threshold he saw in spite of the gloom that his son Diarmuid, who all day long had been with him leading the cow at the ploughing, had eaten his evening meal of potatoes and milk, and in his exhaustion had leant his head down on the deal table and fallen asleep. The boy's unkempt head was almost buried in the potato refuse. No one else the poet found before him in the cabin; and the only light was the glow of the broad fire of turf sods. Looking on the weary figure of the boy, in a flash of thought the poet saw more plainly than when he had stood in it, the stone-strewn patch of mountain-side they had been trying to soften up beneath the plough that bitter February day, and he, with the pride of the Gael in his soul, felt more deeply than ever before the hopelessness of his position, the slavery and indignity. Yes, there it was before his eyes: the dark-coloured patch of turfy hillside, with the weather-bleached rocks that stuck up through its surface piled with the stones and shale his bleeding hands had gathered from it winter after winter. But the vision made his voice gentle, whereas the living sight of it would have filled him with anger.

"Where's your mother, lad?" he said, laying his earthy, toil-thickened fingers on the boy's shoulder, not

without gentleness and warm love in the touch. Diarmuid struggled with his sleepiness.

" Father ? " he said, having failed to catch the question.

" Your mother, lad, where has she gone ? "

" As I came in she was crying out angrily at a stranger, and he was laughing, mocking her, as he went away."

At the words the weariness fell away from the poet's limbs. He was again a strong, gaunt peasant, his voice harsh and angry :

" Is it of Tadhg Smith the Bailiff you are speaking ?" he asked, his eyes on fire.

" It is."

The poet wheeled and made passionately for the door. He stared a moment into the gathering night. Then he returned. And weariness was again in his limbs, making them heavy and awkward. Without a word he seated himself listlessly on the settle, and, a hand on either knee, stared helplessly before him. The sound of waters falling among the rocks outside, the roaring of a far-off bull on a mountain ledge, and, occasionally, the stir of the turf sods as they fell on the flagstone were the only sounds until he spoke :

" We might have left our ploughing till-to-morrow —or the day after," he said.

The boy was blinking at him. The sleep had brought back some fulness to his eyes ; but they were still jaded-looking.

" Yes ! " he answered, not having caught all the meaning in his father's words, and

" 'Tis Yes ! indeed," replied the poet, with a return of the gentleness the first glance at the spent little figure had inspired.

The boy's head went slowly down among the refuse again.

"And I might have left my new song till to-morrow or the next day," the poet added, half to himself.

But though he said the words as if he saw and felt what a foolish thing it was that he should have slipped unknowingly into the making of one more vision-song while this storm was gathering above his weed-tattered roof of scrahs, the power of song was already surging up within him; and a riot of words, golden and flashing with fire and sound and colour, was already taking his brain captive, making it reel for very bliss. But it was not the words of his half-made vision-song were rioting within him now; that song was definitely done with; in the deeper inspiration the bursting of the storm had unloosed, the half-made song seemed but an idle, cold-hearted thing indeed. A new song had leaped within him, leaped with such a strength as made him reckless of the smaller things of life.

His wife entering found him as still as a tree in the evening. She, too, had had time to shed the first madness of despair: she spoke calmly:

"We will be saying farewell to Gortinfliuch," she said; "you have ploughed the ground for a stranger."

He was sensitive; but his song was struggling within him, growing from moment to moment, its promise vast and great: his spirit was on the heights:

"Gortinfliuch!" he said, with earnest scorn—"'tis a poor place for such as you to dwell in."

She was in the act of shaking Diarmuid from his sleep, fearing some fever was overcoming him; but she paused and looked at Eoghan; though always a wildly-earnest man, it was not often he had spoken in such a strain.

"One would think you were one of those poets who teach school, like Eoghan Ruadh," she replied, "wanderers, with whom one place is as good as another."

"One would think," he answered, in the same tone of sad earnestness, "your name had never been put into a song."

Whatever look was in his face it made her recollect the many songs he and other poets had sung to her name; she guessed that the same phrases of these old songs as were in her brain now, were singing also in his. And so she drew quietly away from the sleeping boy and, her hood still hiding her face and head, seated herself on a sugawn chair before the flameless glow; she turned to speak, but speech failed her, she could see that her husband's thoughts were gone far away.

Through the one dim little pane of glass the poet saw the white stars sparkling in the sky, the night-blue of which appeared deepened and enriched by reason of the red turf-glow with which the cabin was filled. He thought of the clods in the new-ploughed field as crumbling under the touch of the keen frost—a thing that had happened ever since the beginning of the world, that would continue to happen until the end, whatever woe befell the world of the Gael.

"God's will be done!" he said aloud out of his thoughts, and bent his head.

"Amen, O Lord," his wife answered.

They both sank again into themselves; and the silence was again deep, except when the boy would stir or snort in his sleep, but at last the woman began to rock herself, and wail in a low and constrained and unnatural tone that had but little resemblance to human speech. Uch! Uch! Ochone! she would cry at the opening of each phrase of her keening; and the name Gortinfliuch was sure to come into every sentence of it: about that homely word she was gathering up the most intimate memories in traditional phrases of woe. One would think that

Gortinfliuch was a pleasant, sunny place, and a soil of good heart, instead of being what it was. And she keened old chieftains of the O'Donovans' and old dynasties of the MacCarthys', the MacCarthys' who once were overlords of all those bleak uplands, their sunken rivers and hidden woodlands.

To that long-continued wail of sorrow, the poet gave no heed. An odd phrase would strike on his ear and stir memories or flash landscapes on his eye. But just then the keening was of no more moment to him than all the other sorrows of men's life ; the keen was a part of that life which his spirit was shaping anew, at its own imperious will. He gave no sign when her voice died away into a long litany of the saints of the Gael, and finished with the name of the Mother of God. There was then a deeper silence than before : the poet was conscious of its breadth, its grandeur. The wheeling of the night's great shield of stars had carried that heart-broken keen away with it, as it had done with a hundred others from the same stricken land ; and that great shield of blue and gold had dipped its eastern rim in the western sea before any other sound except the regular breathing of the boy disturbed the fire-lit gloom.

Silent but not asleep as yet, the woman's mind was dulled and tired ; her grief had spent itself ; her spirit had reached that tranquil shore which lies beyond a flood of tears. Her eyes were wide, cold-lidded, piteous ; and the fire of anger was entirely quenched in them. The poet's eyes were different : in them was an ever-increasing glow, but it was the heat of great energy of creation, not of anger. Except for the eyes and the tense brows, the man's tall and haggard frame might have been asleep. All day long his body had lurched and swung to the timber plough, as it skirted the rocks ; now his body was

having its waking rest, while his mind had taken up the ploughing—ploughing of another sort. And the fierce labour held him until at last the grey dawn touched the beams of the hut with its wan light; at which moment it seemed his song came finally to perfection. The triumphant "ceangal," or envoi, his first enraptured line had aspired to was reached just as the last star drew back into the spreading light of the sky. He rose silently up and stretched himself and appeared to notice for the first time the uneasy attitude of his only child, his head resting on the table, the uneasy attitude of his wife, her head fallen low on her breast. Looking at their pathetic figures, for the first time he became conscious of how the night had passed; and conscious too that a new day was come upon the uplands. There was indignity in either thought, a sense of uncomeliness, of fear; and his hut looked miserable in the cold light of morning; the golden song within his brain, however, he soon recollected, was lavish recompense not alone for this night of stormy wailing, this unhappy dawn, but for all the abiding sorrows he and his had ever wrestled with, only to be at last overthrown. It was more than recompense. It was they themselves—these sorrows of his years—crystallised, transfigured, recreated—the same in elements, the self-same, yet a solace instead of a despair, rest instead of worry, triumph instead of defeat! He had often wondered at the miracle of song; the immediate needs of his spirit bade him now not to wonder but to accept. Because he had accepted his face was calm.

Fearing to awaken his little clan, it was on tiptoe he stepped from the room into the haggard. From a brad he took down a huge, clumsy-handled mall. As if still pursued with the fear of awaking the sleepers, he stepped

gently towards the tumble-down cow-house where their one beast—their whole wealth—had passed the night. He undid the wooden bolt, stooped his head, and entered the close-smelling, brown-hued darkness in a gush of lovely sunbeams. The cow was lying lazily on her belly, staring up at him with mild eyes that blinked in the sudden glare. This the poet saw. Without a moment's delay, he raised the mall, swung it and struck one swift, crashing blow at the animal's skull above the eyes. The mall sank in a little way. It was withdrawn, swung again, and there was again the sound of crunching bone, less sudden, less loud. A quiver that began at the hind feet travelled through the animal's frame like a wave, another, yet another ; then the life went out, and there on the floor was a high mass of bones and flesh. The poet went for his butcher's knife to let the blood run from the veins.

After a short time he re-entered his hut : his wife, his boy still slept. He wondered a moment at the silence. Then in a voice of authority, and speaking the Irish of the Bardic Schools, most classical of tongues, he cried out : " Maire, the daughter of Kearney, and Diarmuid, the son of Eoghan Mor of the Aislingi, awaken ! Awaken and order the house for feasting and revelling—the house of Eoghan Mor of the Vision-songs. Before the coming of night some of them will have gathered at our threshold—the poets of Muskerry and Carbery, Iveleary, and Iveragh and Uibhrathach, of Slieve Luchra and Corkaguiney, of Imokilly and the Deise ; and it will not be long until they will all have come. After the feasting I will silence them and recite, so that they may know it for ever, the song I have made in the night that has passed over us."

The glow of triumph in his appearance was more radiant than his wife had ever seen there before ; yet she

made bold to answer, speaking with reverence, however, and as one who would urge a necessary consideration, and in the common language of the people :

" The feasting will not last for long ; the poets will leave us in the end as desolate as we are now in this dawning : when at last it comes to the nailing up of the door there will be few except ourselves to behold it. Have you thought of the days that will follow on the feasting ? "

" Woman," he answered her, " the sorrow that has made us desolate has this night given birth to a song that will live for ever ; because of it my name and your name and our son's name, which are woven into its amhran metre, will not pass : were I given my choice this moment to choose between Gortinfliuch and my song, to which would I reach my hand ? This trouble that has come to our doors is as nothing to the rapture in my song ! "

That day the poet went east and around by the north ; and his son went north and around by the west ; and other messengers went in other directions announcing the Bardic Sessions that were to be held at the house of Eoghan Mor O'Donovan, and as they sped, the messengers could not refrain from hinting at a new song that had just been made which was thought to excel even Egan O'Rahilly's " Gile na Gile."

. . . . . .

In the eighteenth century a certain traveller, an Englishman, wrote a book of his experiences in the south of Ireland. In one chapter he deals both with Carbery and Iveragh—in neither of which he found much to dwell on. He tells how as he left Carbery and made northwards he came on a curious scene : " As my servant—the droll-spoken Hibernian I have previously made mention of—and myself rode through the mountain pass we became aware that some gathering must be about to take

place farther on towards the west. We overtook and passed several knots of those tatterdemalion figures without which no Irish landscape seems complete ; and these little groups—some of the wayfarers curiously excited in appearance, wildly gesticulating, which seems to be a national characteristic—were all making, we observed, in the one direction. Over the mountains we would notice other groups coming to swell the gathering : it was not wonderful therefore that one in whom curiosity is ever alive, as it seems to be in all those who travel much, more especially if their wanderings take them into foreign lands—should set his horse's head in the same path as these turbulent-looking figures. As daylight failed we came on a miserable hut on the fringe of a bleak upland. Several peat-fires, which had been used apparently for the cooking of huge meals, had begun to die : but their relics still encircled the house and set it apart from the one or two others in the same district. The house itself, a miserable cabin, was crowded to the door with wild and picturesque figures. We heard no language but the Gaelic. In the midst of the assembly, as I took trouble to note, a huge gaunt man was reciting what was apparently a very violent poem—to judge by the excitement under which he laboured. I can recall but two lines which run (by the way my guide offered to translate the whole poem into Greek or Latin, as he did not seem satisfied that he could appositely render it in such English as he knew) :

'Till through my coffin-wood white blossoms start
to grow
No grace I'll beg from one of Cromwell's crew.'

It was a strange scene to come on in the midst of lonely mountains at the close of the day ; but I could not help

reflecting that these strong-bodied, though ill-clad peasants, might have found better employment on an evening admirably suited for ploughing. I noticed in a patch of bogland not far from the hut, some ploughing gear lying haphazardly in a half-length of furrow, as if the peasant had flung it down on hearing a call to join the curious throng. But such reflections come into the mind of the observant traveller at every hand's turn in this strange land."

VANITY.

I.

From that great mountain-wall which divides Cork from Kerry great spurs of broken and terraced rock run out on the Cork side like vast buttresses ; and in the flanks of these great buttresses are round-ended glens, or cooms, as they are called in Irish. Those on the northern flanks of such spurs are gloomy beyond belief.

The dwellers in these cold valleys are of such an austere, puritanic type that the exception among them who is given to the vanities of the world shows out with indescribable, if unholy lustre. In Lyrenascaul old Diarmuid Mac Coitir was such a man ; it may be more correct to say, had been such a man, for he was now of great age and confined to his bed. In the little dark back-room,—it was dark because a sheer slab of rock, grey, lichened, and damp, rose up behind the house,—he passed the long hours of day and night. Between the darkness of the room itself and the darkness that was coming over his eyes, there was not much difference for him now between day and night, except that in the day he could still hear the little stir of life—very little indeed it was—that went on around the miserable bit of a farm, which he had made over to his son. In the few other houses that clung against the sides of Lyrenascaul there were here and there other bed-ridden ancients ; these you beheld with their beads in their hands, night as well as day, and a certain pallor, a quiet peacefulness that lay always on their features,

told you they had long since put this world aside and were now calmly awaiting the call to the next world. Diarmuid had never been of the same mind as these; and instead of that great calmness of theirs, it would be a thick sort of smile would come slowly crawling over his features, sometimes holding them for quite long spells.

He lived there with his wife, who was almost as old as himself and as unworldly as he was worldly; and the only other person in the house was their only remaining son, the still unmarried Michael, now an old man himself, one too who had inherited much of the worldliness and hardness of the ancient who day after day lay bed-ridden in the little dark back-room.

Into that out-of-the-world coom—it was miles from any main road—it was seldom a stray newspaper from Cork or Dublin made its way. You might even to-day live there a long six months and not see one; and I am told that many people easily remember the time when no papers at all entered, with their strange tales of the outside world. Old Diarmuid could not read (indeed his son could hardly do as much) but even if he could what interest would he have found in the news of a world he had never been in, more especially when that news would consist of a series of unrelated facts, with, for him, no yesterday, no to-morrow? News of fairs and markets he might have fathomed, if there were any such. There usually was not. In every paper, however, that chanced to find its way into that forgotten world, there would be a series of paragraphs that always came home to him and gripped his thoughts—these were the death notices. For many years these notices were such a novelty that he learned each of them by heart from some other person's reading, and would recite the latest to his gossips, and compare it with ones he had earlier learned, and go on to

speak of the difference between one which mentioned that a Requiem Mass had been sung and one which was content with the modest : R.I.P.

At that stage he was, when, without warning, he was one day struck with a stroke of paralysis. He took to his bed. One evening he sat up, thinking of what had befallen him. He called to his son :

" Hi ! " he said, " Michael, Michael ! "

Michael had been chopping furze to give as food to their poor sorry nag ; he came in, chopper in hand :

" Well ? "

" Tell me this, Michael, if 'twas dead you found me this day, or any other day, would you put a little biteen of a notice in the paper—just a little biteen of a wan with R.I.P. at the end of it ? "

Michael looked at him and noticed how strong and sturdy he was. He smiled, not sweetly or lovingly. He threw an eye around the dark, almost empty little house, he took a step to the open door and glanced with scorn at the scraggy patch of land that was their farm ; he came back and said :

" Isn't it well you deserve it from me ? "

" Don't be hard, Michael, boy, there's a good time coming ; you won't have to face what I had to face, the struggling with landlords, and the law—the law, that would leave a rich man poor and a poor man broken. Give me your word, Michael, boy, when it pleases God to call me you'll put a little biteen of a notice in the paper so that— "

" I won't then give you me word. An old man like you, 'tis something else should be troubling you besides having your name stuck in the paper and you cold on the bed— " And then, just as he was about to begin his furze-chopping again, he called out :

"Was there ever anyone from Lyrenascaul in the paper and he dead?"

"That's why!" said the old man, sitting up suddenly, while quite a glow came back into his heavy face.

Not long after there did really happen to be a death-notice from Lyrenascaul in the paper. It was American gold put it there. Old John Kevane had died. The news had been leisurely enough sent to his son in America. A few days after its arrival there the notice appeared in the Cork and Dublin papers—cabled from America! Whereupon old Diarmuid Mac Coitir renewed his importunity, not, however, with more success, "There's a great fear of you dying, a great fear indeed!" his son would answer, and pass the thing off as a joke.

II.

It was long after midnight when the old man heard his son's horse-and-cart jolting up the rock-strewn bohereen. In that dead hour he could hear it even when a great way off. He had not expected Michael earlier, he had been at Inchigeela fair. Some little brightness came into the dull face to hear the sound of the wheels. That fair day used to be a bright feature in his own life in the days now gone for ever; he thought it meant the same for his son, as in some measure it did; and with each recurrence of the event some little trace of his old alertness would struggle up in the old man's face, and that unlovely smile was sure to follow. After long waiting he heard the son putting up his horse. He entered and his face was a great broad smile.

"'Tis a queer thing I'm after hearing this day," he said to his father.

"What was it?" and the old man scanned his son's

face, rather pleased, perhaps, as well as a little jealous, to find in it the excitement and jollity of strong drink.

"What was it?" he said.

"Well, then, 'tis this: I'm after learning, and from good authority, that if yourself and herself died together on the wan day on me I'd get a notice in the paper for the same money as if it was only one of ye was in it!" And he sat on a stool, with one gaiter dangling in his hand, and he laughed stupidly, and with such loudness as seemed sacrilegious in that solemn mountain glen, in that great darkness and silence.

"Wouldn't ye do it, and I promise ye, ye'd get it—the notice!"

"Do what?"

"Die, the pair of ye, on the wan day!"

The old man growled at him and turned away. The son went off in a great fit of laughter. Likely enough his horse had often heard him laugh that night as he came the long twenty-seven miles of bogland and mountain. And the great joke held him for several weeks!

Although he had answered not a word, this new idea took possession of the old man's mind. But whereas formerly in those odd moments when in imagination he would behold his neighbours passing the paper which contained his own death-notice from hand to hand, he always felt nothing but joy and pride, now there was in the dream some shadowy fear he could not fathom, could not put aside. There was certainly no feeling of pride left in him. In fact he soon came to trying to avoid the vision; it had now, however, become part of himself, so keenly had he desired it, so frequently had he indulged it. He could not avoid it. At any moment of great stillness it would suddenly stand before him—a group of his neighbours—old Padraig Lynch, old Tadhg Cremin, old

Steve Casey, with his one eye, old Morty Shea, with his high, white forehead and glasses—there they were, all gathered together around the Master while he read out to them " At their son's residence in Lyrenascaul, at an advanced age, Jeremiah and Mary Cotter . . . ." Ah ! that was it : there were now always the two names coupled together in the death-notice he beheld his neighbours reading. Yet in spite of his new-sprung hatred he couldn't banish the vision, couldn't prevent its re-appearance at the most unexpected hours.

If he woke up in the still night what else was there for him to think about ? In fact it seemed as if he had been waked up for the one purpose of seeing the vision, as if indeed the vision had been waiting for him to awaken. In great and terrifying clearness there was Morty Shea, that calm, saintly-looking man with the white forehead and the glasses, there was Steve Casey, with the one eye, a black slit where the other should be, listening, intently listening ; there, too, was ——. All joy had passed away out of old Diarmuid's mind.

When his wife, who was now almost ninety, he himself was ninety-three, brought in a ponny of milk to him he would strain whatever sight he had left to look slyly up in her face ; he would also pass his hand over hers—he was glad if it felt distinctly hotter or distinctly colder ; he was depressed if it seemed the same as his own. He would make sly inquiries of his son as to how she was in health.

It was another fair day, a mellow harvest-golden day in September ; the son was again from home. He would not be home till late. Towards evening the old woman brought in some milk and home-made bread to the bed-ridden man. They had nothing to say to one another. They were too old. She waited till he had

finished, she then carried out the vessels again. He settled himself for a comfortable sleep; he would then wake up refreshed and be ready to receive the news of the fair; it had become a point of honour with him to be awake on such occasions. He had not been long asleep when he awoke with a curious tingling sensation, and there was that terrible vision once again, the same faces, the same attitudes. And he was disturbed. He should not have awakened so soon.

"Maire!" he called out in his wheezy voice.

He got no answer.

"Maire! Maire! I'm queer."

There was no sound, except the water running down that slab of rock behind the house

"Maire! Maire!"

Even while he called, it was of his own fear he was thinking. And then, horribly real—the people in the vision began to move, a hand was lifted, an eye turned—

. . . . . .

"Don't forget the R.I.P., Master," said their son. "If that wasn't in it he wouldn't be satisfied, even how long we made it."

"I have R.I.P. in it."

"Read it now."

"At their son's residence, Lyrenascaul, Jeremiah and Mary ——"

Again Nora Kelly rose from the table, at which she had been eating, looked through the window, turned from it, and spoke to her sister, who was busy at the fire :

" When the train was passing Kilcully I said to him, ' Look out the window, father, you might never see Cork city again,' and he turned on me and said, ' Do I want to see it ? How did I come into it ? What was I thinking of all these years and I walking the streets of it ? Tell me that ? Little I care if I never see it again '—that's what he said, and no, he wouldn't look out."

Margaret, to whom she had spoken, then came to the window from the fire and said :

" Look at him now, God help us, he don't know where to rest ; that's the tenth time he's after examining that cowshed." And she called out : " Father, come in ; there's a sup of tea here for you, come in or it will be cold on you ; haven't you to-morrow or the day after to look at them, they'll be there to-morrow as well as to-night."

The old man turned round ; as will happen in strange surroundings he did not at once spy out the window where the voice had come from ; when, however, his eyes rested on it, on his two daughters, it suddenly struck him, as if he had been thinking unwonted thoughts of her, that there was something wanting in Margaret's voice. It was a strong voice, with the hard, firm consonants, the pure vowels of the Irish language in it. She was now a middle-aged woman, and although she had lived thirty

of her years in the city of Cork, where English is not spoken with any sort of firmness at all, her speech was still full of the strength that would carry up far hillsides, herding cattle or calling to a neighbouring homestead. She was already a full-grown girl when her father's house in Carrignadoura in rock-strewn Iveleary was levelled with the ground on a terrible night of wind and fire, bloodshed and marching men. Perhaps it was that one night, rather than the previous years of growth in that dispeopled land, had fixed the temper of her mind, hardening it, making it incapable of being wrought upon by the dilly-dally of the city. Curious, then, that now, heard by him for the first time in thirty years in rural surroundings, the voice struck her father as being somewhat rough and hard ; its accent did not chime with his thoughts. But it was only a passing fancy. She had always been the love of his heart, and was that now more than ever. He smiled back at the two women brightly ; they were so happy-looking in the fresh-painted window-frame of the brand-new house that the Estate Commissioners had built for him—he smiled back at them, waving his stick and quaintly doffing his hat, as he had seen the grand folk in the city do. But he had no intention of going in to them. Half the farmyard he had not yet examined. Many of the beasts were still unfamiliar to him ; he knew he was mixing them up, one with another. The boundaries of the farm were laid along a ridge of trees ; and as yet he had not got near that ridge. He could scarcely tear himself away from the yard. Better to him than the drinking of wine were the smell and the sight of the beasts as they lurched, almost fiercely, into the milking stalls, or stood around outside, their nostrils spreading with expectancy, their hoofs stamping impatiently on the hard ground. He had been so long away

from all that, cooped up in the city, separated from every one of the intimate sounds, smells, sights, that had helped to create him what he was on that night of passion when he lashed out against armed men! A long exile it had been, and in exile would his days have ended only for the grit of this strong-voiced, middle-aged woman, his daughter. All these years she had been watching the twistings and turnings of the many new laws that were made from time to time dealing with the land and landlordism; she made her own of them, clause by clause, judgment by judgment. And her task had been her own, no one helping. Nora, her sister, had yielded herself up to the city's influence; she was a young thing when it gripped her; both she and her brothers, one elder, one younger, soon lost whatever hope they had brought with them from Carrignadoura that they would ever again be rooted in the soil. Perhaps they did not greatly care.

No one had helped her then, unless it was the old man; and his help had been fitful, now he would be all brightness, quoting old poems of the Gaelic bards, old prophecies of the Gaelic saints, but at another time he would chide her or laugh at her: "Rooted in the soil again—we will, child, and there'll be Kings in Tara!"

When at last the farm did come to them it was beyond even Margaret's expectations: eighty acres of prime land watered by the Blackwater, so rich, so kind, that the old man asked himself as he surveyed it whether he would now go back to Carrignadoura if choice were given him. As he went about he was contrasting the two countries—the meagre soil of the west, which had the colour, the smell, the texture of turf, and this deep, well-fattened soil which ran over with prodigality—the condition of the eighteen head of cattle was sufficient to show what it was. While he gazed at these sleek, lazy-looking

animals, his inner eye was full of the skinny, wiry, daring cattle of the hills. He could hardly believe these cattle were his own; such beasts called up to vision a big house, rich acres, a family of long descent. But his they were, his own—and the rich acres as well, and a house that seemed very big to him when he remembered the dark little hovel in Carrignadoura over which blood had been spilled. And all would be his and his children's and his children's children for ever! He glowed with a solemn joy. He could not understand why he felt like sitting down in some quiet place and weeping. To banish the thought he would begin reckoning his riches once again; and so sure as he began, the past would once more become alive. He would recall the names, the appearance of the others who were evicted with him on that far-off night of marching men, of blazing roofs and stampeding cattle. None of them, so far as he knew, had been reinstated. They had no daughter like his Margaret. They were scattered to the four winds. It had been like a second Famine to them—child had drifted away from father, husband from wife, brother from sister. What he would give to be able to gather round him now even a few of these lost companions! But they were gone for ever. He turned to where the hedge skirted the bohereen. There, to his astonishment, a dark-featured man was staring at him, staring steadily, with meaning and wonder it seemed. He stared in return. It was Tadhg Kearney from Tooreenanean!—a man he had not seen even once since that far-off night of struggle: "Tadhg! Tadhg!" he called—"Is it you?" But he couldn't wait for an answer: "Look," and his stick swept round the bawn fields—"all mine, and these yonder as well—and the cattle!" How would Tadhg Kearney, proud man, take that? He turned to watch

him. But . . . He went forward. What he had taken for a dark-featured man was nothing but an old stump of a tree that stood up from the brosna of the hedge. He went right up to it. "God leave me the senses," he said, and he poked at the trunk with the tip of his stick, as one does to a beast at a fair. And he smiled. But almost immediately he grew solemn and anxious again: "I'm after thanking You, O Christ, on my bended knees," he muttered, his hat in his hand, "O Christ, King of Sunday, and you too, Mother of the Son of God, Mary of the Graces."

More quietly, more contained than before, he wandered from place to place; he did not now look at one thing more than another, yet all the time he was deeply conscious of the peace that was around him, the fatness, the well-being, the golden evening, the peace.

Under far-spreading boughs of great beechen boles he wandered; the ash-grey trunks were stouter than the great pillars he had seen in the big churches in the city. Low gleams of red sunshine shooting wilfully here and there turned the deep grass and the flowers and the brushwood to a rich golden colour—the colour of altar vessels. It was a fairy land to one who had grown up in Iveleary, where few trees are to be seen except the birch, the rowan, the holly—shrunken trees, meagre of foliage. Suddenly he stopped. He had heard merry voices; he listened; the air was full of them—a call, a cry, a ringing cheer, overtaking one another, mingling, separating. He crept slyly nearer. He came upon a well-kept path—it was dappled with sun and shadow Almost as he discovered it, two Dominicans, very tall, very stately in their long robes of white and black, swept swiftly by, their hands were hidden in their sleeves, their voices were low, their faces earnest. They were gone! They

had not seen him, although he had clutched his hat from his head and bowed with reverence. He felt a little dazed. Perhaps he had not seen them at all—he remembered the tree-trunk, how he had taken it for Tadhg Kearney. He caught hold of a slender ash-bole and leaned out into the pathway. Yes, there were the two figures, with the sun and shadow playing upon their backs as they went along the wide avenue. And others were coming. He withdrew into the shade. Looking beyond the path, he saw wide, level fields, crowded with brightly-clad youthful figures: they were hurling. It was from these the merry cries had come. To his right, through a screen of thin foliage, he caught sight of sun-white walls, buttresses, carved stones—many buildings, one of them a church: the windows were tipped with fire. It was all very unexpected, beautiful, radiant. Old poems swept into his mind, poems that were written in the darkest years of the eighteenth century when nothing except hope was left the Gael. Such an Ireland as this he had come to know to-day they had prophesied. "The laws of Rome will be in practice—religion without blemish"—would be a literal rendering of two of the lines that swept upon him; over and over he recited them, for the Irish words were full of bright music and deftness. But a bell clanged with authority, and the figures went from the fields; he saw the priests crossing them diagonally. And then it seemed to him that a band of music had suddenly ceased!

Excited, he turned to retrace the way he had come. He felt he needed to rest; he had had too many impressions in too short a time. He would sit quietly by the hearth and take out his beads. That would be best. He drew swiftly as he could towards the farmyard. But again he was perplexed. And he began to

fear for himself. There, too, were merry voices, seemingly a host of them—not in the farmyard, the farmyard was deserted. Through it he went. A door opened: he heard a ringing voice giving out fine words and phrases: "To the Gaelic race the riches of the air above it, the soil within it, the seas around it!" He could hear no more for the shout of approval. "Rooted in the soil for ever, as the love of Ireland in our hearts!" was the next phrase he caught up. He hastened on. In other years he had heard such phrases, only instead of ringing with the pride of victories gained, they had rung with the hatred of a dispossessed people. "Who shall rule us but ourselves—who is fit for it?" His heart gave a leap; he made to enter the house. It was crowded with men. He then went around to the front. On the roadway, mounted on a car which had been roughly decked with green boughs, was the orator—a man with a shining forehead, and eyes full of the pride of race. Everywhere were green boughs; everywhere, too, green flags with inscriptions in red gold upon them. He saw a crowd of golden instruments. And all the time the high-hearted phrases were ringing in his ears—the myriad love-names of Ireland were invoked. Each had its own associations—The Little Dark Rose, the Sean Bhean Bhocht, the Silk of the Kine, Innisfail, the Plain of Conn, Fodhla, Banbha—they were as so many stops on an organ. Not one of them but set old songs of the Gael stirring in his memory. He trembled with excitement. Only his anxiety to hear everything, to understand everything, kept him alive, he felt. And his thought renewed to him the priests walking in the avenue, the brightly-clad figures on the green, the sun-tipped windows. And the rich underfoliage, the great boles, the wide branches. He clutched his forehead: his name

had been put into the discourse, he heard the words "His fight at Carrignadoura!" He was being seized and dragged forward—but his daughter Margaret and his daughter Nora were near him, and his son John was helping him—and all the faces about him were those of men who had fought and won. As if by an afterthought, somebody took the hat from his head: there was a deafening outburst of cheering, it was more like a roar—his locks were unexpectedly white. It was as if the people thought of those grey locks as spoil from that distant battle field. The roar redoubled; it would never end. There was confusion too. His thoughts were going astray. A young man stood before him: he was speaking in Irish: he had never seen a young man look so handsome, so proud. He looked like a king's son. The old man wouldn't dare to reply; his limbs were quivering, he turned away, he drew down his daughter's head: "What is it?" she said. "Are there Kings in Tara?" he whispered, in an excited voice, breathy, warm, husky.

. . . . . .

When the triumph was over, when the music had died away along the road, and no one remained in the house except the old man and his children, they began to chaff him on the great reception he had had. He struggled with them good-humoredly.

"You haven't it right," he said, "you haven't it right at all."

"Haven't we now? Haven't we now?" his son kept tormenting him.

"No; you haven't; that isn't what I was thinking about at all."

"Isn't it now; maybe 'twas something grander then?"

"It wasn't."

" What was it ? "

" I asked Margaret here about the Kings— "

" You did —"

" Well, and if she said ' Yes ' instead of ' No ' what was it I had in my mind, do you think ? "

They stood up and laughed—his head was thrust out so earnestly.

" Well, what had you in your mind ? "

" You won't understand."

" We'll try— "

He gestured with his stick :

" The best of them beasts outside—I'd send him the road to Tara—'tis long since I had anything to give anybody."

He took out his beads and they knelt for the night prayers.

It was a rich night in autumn ; the earth was fruiting.

THE CHILD SAINT.

The people in the same lodging-house sometimes spoke of him as The Child : at other times they called him The Saint. One name was as apt as the other ; in spite of the squalid environment in which he lived, he was a saint ; in spite of his age, a child. His hair was scanty, wispy, tow-like, and the scalp, not too clean, showed through it. His knees were bent. He walked with his back almost parallel with the ground, his spine long since having suffered injury. From that awkward posture his eyes stared up at you, full of light, smiling, brave with innocence. In spite of his hand's heavy clutch on its knob his stick was always trembling ; the fact reminded you of his age when his brave eyes would have deceived you.

His room was filled with objects of devotion ; of other furniture there was little or none. He had several pictures of the Blessed Virgin, a few of the Holy Family, many of the better-known saints—St. Patrick, St. Joseph, St. Anthony. He had several statues, besides a bottle of Lourdes water, and of Holy Water he kept a small supply in a little chinaware font which a chinaware angel, kneeling, upheld. Among these, his treasures, he lived alone in quiet ecstasy, speaking much to himself—perhaps to them, too, on occasions.

He knew that the Phelan family, they lived on a lower landing, were in trouble. His hand catching his door, he listened to the rent-collector's voice growing louder, angrier ; then he heard him begin to pound his stick on the

stairs ; so sure as he did that a notice-to-quit would follow. The Child began to scramble down the stairs to the rescue. " My," " My," " My," he repeated as he made from step to step.

" Give her till to-morrow, give her till to-morrow," he cried, when he had come into view of the little group ; and as he flopped down he continued to call out, " Give her till to-morrow."

" 'Tis too long I'm after giving her, I'm pestered with her."

" Give her wan last chance, 'twill be paid to-morrow."

" At this time to-morrow ? "

" Yes, at this time to-morrow ; or say in the evening, at seven ; give us the whole day ? "

The agent put his book in his breast-pocket, stooped his head, and piloted himself down the crazy, box-like stairs. He trusted The Child to come at the rent for Mrs. Phelan, it didn't matter to him how, so long as he got it.

Meanwhile The Child refused to tell Mrs. Phelan how he meant to relieve her ; no, he wouldn't tell her, but she need have no fear, he'd be there to-morrow to meet the Man, as they called the rent-collector. With this she had to be satisfied. She tightened her shawl about the white-faced babe on her arm, and was soon in the midst of the traffic spiritlessly singing, " The Rocks of Bawn." A hardened beggar-woman, who would believe her story of the notice-to-quit ? She didn't bother telling it.

When she had started on her rounds, The Child took up his chinaware angel, and having emptied the Holy Water into a bottle, dusted the figure and put it into his beggar-man's bag ; the shining head of golden curls looked out over the edge. Then he mounted up on his rickety bed and took down one of his loveliest pictures. In it the Blessed

Virgin was seated on a Renaissance throne, behind her an Italian-blue sky and hosts of golden stars. He cleaned off the dust and laid the picture flat on the bed. Into the great tail-pocket of his coat he put a small painted plaster statue of St. Anthony. Then he came back to his picture on the bed, looked at it, gave it a last rub, caught it up, and with great difficulty made down the narrow stairs. His beggar's bag he had also with him, the shining angel peeping from it.

Earnestly he shuffled his way to where Mrs. McCarthy was selling bedsteads, stools, and "altars" on the Coal Quay—the open-air market-place in that city. She undertook to sell his wares, he sitting by on one of her stools, his two hands on the knob of his stick. He knew she would make more on them than he would get in any pawn-office.

The chinaware angel was the first to go. In the bartering the old man took no part, but just as the purchaser—a hale, soft-featured woman—was moving off, he said:

"Pardon me for making so bold, ma'am; but might you be living in Blarney Lane?"

He thought she looked like a woman from Blarney Lane.

"No then," she answered, "I'm from the South Side."

"Ah," he murmured, "Evergreen, maybe?"

"No, Gunpowder Lane, if you know where that is?"

"I do then—Gunpowder Lane—well, well."

The purchaser went off, her bargain under her shawl. The picture, being large, and judging by its look, expensive, took a lot of selling. A half-crown is big money on the Coal Quay, yet this Mrs. McCarthy fixed as the price. Several people examined it, and at each chance Mrs. McCarthy would take it up on her lap, stand it on

an angle, wipe it with her apron, and call it a handsome piece. She succeeded in selling it to a young mother.

"I can't afford it," she said, "and I can't leave it after me—that's how it is."

"'Tis a blessing you're taking into your house," said Mrs. McCarthy. Then the old man raised his eyes:

"If I'm not making too bold, are you the young woman that keeps the shop in Windmill Road?"

"I never had a shop, sir," she answered.

"Do you live in Windmill Road?"

"No."

"Nor in Gunpowder Lane?"

"No." She was looking at him with large, shining eyes.

"Do you live in the South Side at all?"

"No—'tis on the Rock Steps I live."

"The Rock Steps—well, well—that's not too far—well, well, look at that, and I thinking you were from the South Side."

Going from them she looked questioningly at Mrs. McCarthy; perhaps she had doubts of the old man's sanity.

It was just six o'clock when a very old woman bought the St. Anthony. As she was bargaining for it, the Angelus rang, and this, perhaps, made her give the full penny asked. She lived in Pouladuff.

"My, my," said The Child, "what a long way off, what a long way off."

He rose from his stool.

"What do you want to know where the people live for?" Mrs. McCarthy questioned him.

"Wouldn't I like to be thinking of where they are? Hadn't I that picture before my eyes for the last forty years? Will it be easy for me to live without thinking of it?"

Hobbling homewards, he repeated his lesson over and over again : The Angel in Gunpowder Lane, Holy Mother in a house on the Rock Steps, St. Anthony in Pouladuff.

. The next day, he paid the rent for Mrs. Phelan. Straightway then he began to save up his odd pence and halfpence to buy back his treasures. There was a vacant space on his mantelpiece, another on his window-sill (how lovely the painted statue used to look there among the green-leaved geraniums when the sun shone in !) ; the worst gap of all, however, was the huge space of clean wall-paper where the picture had hung. Because of these blank spaces, the room looked upset, unfurnished. But he was a saint as well as a child ; somehow his savings, pinch as he would, refused to mount up. The fact is, money would burn a hole in his pocket. How could he keep a grip on it if he saw a blind man's hand stretched out to the callous passers-by, or a hungry-looking boy staring in at a shop window ?

Again and again he had to begin anew. One night in bed he reckoned up with some excitement that twelve months would soon have gone by. And, as luck had it, a few days afterwards he chanced to hear a powerful sermon on the precious ointment that Magdalen had poured upon our Lord's feet, " wasting money that might be devoted to charity," as the preacher said, throwing great scorn on the wisdom of the world into his enunciation of these words. Yes, the old man felt all that sermon come home to him, every phrase. Cost what it would, the end of the twelve months would see him with all his treasures gathered and housed once more within his attic under the slates.

On the anniversary of the sale he rose quite early, heard Mass, and set off in much uncertainty to gather his treasures. He almost fell down when it suddenly struck

him that they might have frequently changed owners since his parting with them, and that he might after all never gather them together again.

He came in and went up the stairs at one o'clock in the day.

"Mrs. Mehigan!" he called, as he passed her door (she was an old bed-ridden woman).

"Yes, what is it?"

"I have wan of them—the angel."

At five o'clock he passed up again

"Mrs. Mehigan! Mrs. Mehigan!"

"Yes."

"I've another—St. Anthony."

He passed up a third time; it was now about eight o'clock. He didn't speak. Mrs. Mehigan listened to his steps, how tired he seemed, going up to his room! She called out:

"Have you the last wan?"

"No." She thought 'twas a gasp; by way of sympathy she said: "Oh, dear."

"But I'm on the track of it," he answered, quite brightly. He went out again.

The whole house was dark, its many inhabitants snoring when he was heard struggling up the stairs once more, almost as a drunken man would, falling from side to side, and missing his steps, it seemed.

The next morning Mrs. Phelan came into Mrs. Mehigan's room. She believed, she said, the Saint hadn't got the last one after all. Mrs. Mehigan answered that God was good. "Go up and see," she said. Mrs Phelan went up, knocked, and got no reply. She came back to Mrs. Mehigan.

"He's fast asleep; I didn't knock very loud, I only tapped at the door; 'tis how he's exhausted entirely."

"I'm sure he had something in his arms, he nearly fell against that door as he went up."

After some time Mrs. Phelan was sent up again. Mrs. Mehigan heard her knocking once, twice, thrice. Then she came down, as white as a sheet.

"Go out for Father Maher, child," said Mrs. Mehigan.

They found the Saint sitting on the floor, an unfinished bowl of bread and milk between his legs; opposite his now-cold eyes was his Renaissance Madonna, it stood propped against the edge of the bed; guarding it on the right was St. Anthony, on the left the chinaware angel, its font full of holy water. The candle that had lighted his treasures for him had burnt out. Mrs. Phelan says when first she entered the room there was the smell of lovely flowers. Mrs. Mehigan says she heard far-away singing in the dead of night. In any case it is pleasant to think how sweet the old man's thoughts must have been as his eyes began to close for ever. Not far-away music nor newly-gathered flowers would be so sweet.

THE COBBLER'S DEN.

I.

A TRUMP OF DOOM.

In every close-knitted nest of lanes you will find a sort of guest-house—a chosen spot where the gossips meet. It may be a little huxter's shop, or a little newspaper shop, a barber's shop, or, best of all, a cobbler's workroom.

If you went even casually into John Ahern's little cobbler's shop—it had once been a shop anyway, for the counter still remained—you would feel almost at once that you had arrived at one of those belated guest-houses. First of all, you leant over the counter and he looked up at you from his stool—a kindly-eyed man, with a head entirely bald, except for a fuzzy-wuzzy top-knot in front, that seemed to announce somehow the innocence that was in him. But before long you were inside the counter, seated on a crazy stool at the fire, and he had wheeled round his bench to be able to gossip with greater comfort.

The Blind Man would then come in. He spent his days going from door to door, encumbered with a stick and an accordeon. The stick he never seemed to use, the accordeon he never played; yet on a good day he would bring back eighteenpence. He was a quiet, happy man who loved his pipe. Although he might have passed the day in the most noisy part of the city, he would sit

quite silent of an evening at John Ahern's fireside, as if he had only risen from his bed and had not yet heard the day's news.

And then Maggie Maw would come in. She spoke too much, far too much; but when she took it too far entirely you could say to her, and keep on saying it, Maggie Maw, Maggie Maw, and so get her out, raging mad. She was a dealing woman. From wholesale chinaware stores she would buy for little or nothing chipped ware and odd cups and saucers, and this merchandise she took from house to house and exchanged for soiled or torn clothes which, in turn, she bartered for cash. She was worn to a shadow; but it was not her bartering had worn her away; it was her spirit. This you knew if you saw how she tumbled headlong into whatever argument would be going on at John Ahern's. There was scarcely a night that would not finish by her flinging out of the house with fire in her eyes—victorious or, for the moment, routed.

Very quietly she would come in; she always came in very quietly—passionate people are either dead or blazing. But at her appearance a change would come over us all; John Ahern would begin to talk loud and to hammer on his lap-iron like anything, this was to get up his courage; and the Blind Man's head would begin to move about more jerkily: when he took the pipe from his mouth and held it poised an inch or two away from his lips, the storm had begun.

This night when she came in, the cobbler was in the midst of some old rambling stories he had about the floods that used to rise up in the centre of the city in other years. Dead cows, he said, he had seen floating in the streets, as well as great trees and empty boats. And he had seen a hen-coop on one occasion. But the worst flood

of all was the one that swept a poor watchman off his feet as he turned a corner, and drowned him.

"Maybe 'twas a big flood," said Maggie, "but it wasn't as big a flood as was in me Uncle Din's time."

"'Twas bigger, Maggie," the shoemaker replied, calmly.

"It couldn't be bigger," returned Maggie, just as calmly.

"'Twas bigger, Maggie, I seen the two of them."

"How could it be bigger? What was it but a rain flood? Didn't I often hear tell?"

"'Twas a tide flood, Maggie, everywan knows that."

"How could it be a tide flood, in the name of goodness? Catch a watchman not to know if a tide flood wasn't coming—unless he was a country boy, and no wan ever seen a watchman that was a country boy."

"'Twas a rain flood and a tide flood together, I'm telling ye," said the cobbler, giving the boot-sole a terrible bang.

"Well, that's the best of all," said Maggie, with that pertinacity of hers which always made us wild, "a rain flood and tide flood together, and me brave boy of a watchman, born and reared in the Marsh, not to know that neither wan nor the other was coming!—well, Mr. Ahern, you must think we're terrible greenhorns altogether. Of course I'm not saying that we aren't, because we all know what you think of us; but praise be to God 'tisn't to you we'd be coming if 'twas a character we'd be wanting and —"

But a little barefooted boy had come in to see if Mr. Field's boots were done, and as Maggie noticed how he was staring up at her, she thought it better to turn away and poke the fire and at last to sit down. The Blind

Man put the pipe again into his mouth and leaned back against the wall.

When the little boy had gone out, the cobbler remained bent over his work for quite a long time; but Maggie was busy with her thoughts—even the Blind Man could feel that.

"The flood in me Uncle Din's time, 'twas awful altogether," she began, quite simply, "'twas how the weirs bursted; and of course no wan was prepared for a thing like that. Maybe the people living near the bridge, although I never heard tell of anywan living there, maybe they heard the roaring of all the water coming down; but not a living soul was thinking of a flood that night. They were all in their beds with the first sleep over them—only for Jim Costelloe wouldn't there be hundreds and thousands of them drownded—a flood like that rising up unbeknownst!"

The Blind Man took his pipe from his lips—an action that encouraged Maggie more than one might imagine; her brain worked the quicker for it.

"Jim Costello was sleeping on the ground floor, and 'twas a noise again the window he heard that woke him, and he sat up and he said, 'Cush, cush,' thinking that maybe it was a cat; but, lo and behold you, there it was again, rubbing and leaving; and so he pulled the blind aside, and he saw a light moving, and there were voices speaking to wan another. But the queer thing was he didn't see any water, for what was he doing but looking through the branches of a tree—'twas a floating tree was rubbing again the glass all the time. All at wanst the tree said Swish! and away it went sailing for itself, and then he could see the lantern shining in the water, and when he put his foot out of the bed, 'twas into cold water he put it. He called out to the people in the boat, and they

came over and took him off; but just when he was in it, he said: 'Wait a while, now, men; I won't be long,' and he went back into his little caboose of a room again, and they waited, thinking 'twas something good he was gone back for; but sure it wasn't; what did he come out with but his connopium."

"His what?" said the Blind Man.

"His connopium, he was in a band the boys had. Well, they pushed away through the floods, and there wasn't a sign of life anywhere, only blackness and misery all around them, with the houses dark, and all fast asleep. 'Tis right we give them a chance for their lives, anyway,' said Jim, and with that he blew into his connopium terrible strong, and, to make it sound like the last day, he played up 'Arise ye dead and come to Judgment!'"

"My God!" said the Blind Man.

"Yes indeed, sir, 'Arise ye dead and come to Judgment!' was what the poor souls heard, and maybe some of them dreaming and some of them sick and sore."

"But they were all saved?"

"Hundreds and thousands; but sure some of them were never the same afterwards." She said this rising up from her chair and pulling her shawl about her.

"Never the same, sir," she repeated.

"They warn't!" said the shoemaker, under his breath.

"'Tis to this good man I'm talking, sir," said Maggie, indicating the inoffensive Blind Man, and she left us, rather more self-satisfied than usual.

After a pause the Blind Man said:

"What's a connopium?"

John Ahern raised up his head and looked bothered for a moment; then enlightenment came into his eyes:

"There's no such thing," he said, drawing hard at the

waxed hemp, saying "Ha! ha!" breathily in the dint of exertion. Then there was another pause; and again the Blind Man spoke:

"That tune, 'Arise ye dead and come to Judgment,' must be grand, but I never heard it?"

"Hard for ye."

"How so-a?"

"There's no such tune: you couldn't believe daylight from that wan," said the shoemaker.

THE COBBLER'S DEN.

II.

THE HEIRESS.

The shoemaker came in with the light of discovery n his eyes; he was both happy and excited. The Blind Man and myself were waiting for him, and I was now more than glad at not having gone away; for when that light is in a person's countenance it is a cruel thing f he must keep his story all to himself. Besides, a story of something that has just happened is always better than an old story you have heard before. By the way in which he delayed over beginning his tale, we knew he thought much of it. He was evidently very pleased to have us there to listen to him.

"Leave me alone! Leave me alone!" he was saying as he tied on his apron, although we hadn't as yet questioned him about the matter at all. "Leave me alone!" he said again as he sat down on his bit of a stool; and "Well! Well!" he muttered, as he looked through his glasses at a pair of boots that had come in since he went out; he didn't see a bit of these two raggy boots he held in his hand, soles up. All this, of course, was acting. At last he had to make a beginning:

"Do you know what I'm after seeing?" he said, looking straight at us.

"We do not," we said.

"Maggie Maw," he answered, "and she arm-in-arm with the Heiress!"

"Go on!" we said, surprised.

"Yes, indeed, on the Grand Parade."

And then he went into the whole matter. The point of his discovery was that Maggie Maw—we had often heard her—had been the most outspoken and vigorous scorner of all those who had been seen to make up to the Heiress, now that she was an heiress and had ceased to be an apple woman. Old the Heiress was, old and withered, a small little thing, a quiet but not unhappy woman so long as her trade was apple-selling in the open-air market-place. There she used to sit, her apples spread around her in great heaps, and if no one was buying she made the time pass by humming old songs that had been street songs when she was a little girl. We had never known that she had a brother in America until the news came one fine morning that he had died and left his sister heiress to half a brand-new American city. Of course the will was disputed both in the Irish and American law-courts, as such wills always are—and altogether there was a heap of trouble, the days, the months, the years passing on meanwhile, and feeble wits getting older and feebler. Far and wide poor old Judy Brien, honest woman, became known as the Heiress, and her picture appeared in the newspaper; it was no wonder then people had made up to her; and these people were scorned by us who had known poor Judy all our lives, but of course none of us scorned them as Maggie Maw did: fire would come into her eyes as she spoke of them. And now here was Maggie Maw herself making up to the Heiress! The like of it was never known. The shoemaker awaited her with shining eyes; and we waited to see what would happen.

At last she came in; and immediately the shoemaker began:

"Wisha, Maggie," he said, "maybe you could give a poor struggling shoemaker the lend of a ten-pound note?" And he winked at us.

"Maybe 'tis two of them the poor man will be getting, if he waits for it," she answered, settling herself down, and looking around at us, as if she had said something very clever. There was a little rest then; but the shoemaker began again:

"Mrs. Cullinane," he said to her, "maybe when you get the chance, you'll recommend a man you've known all your life to the grand ladies—the grand ladies who'd be able to give him a decent penny for his work?"

She knew then he was up to something. She cried out:

"In the name of goodness, Mr. Ahern, tell me what it is ye're driving at, at all, at all?"

"Mrs. Cullinane," he answered, "I'm driving at nothing, only we're honoured by the grand company we're keeping this holy and blessed night!"

How it would have ended I don't know; but then a very queer thing happened: Just as John Ahern let it out that he had seen her walking arm-in-arm with the Heiress, and just as she cried out, "'Tis a shame for ye; leave the poor creature alone; I tell you I wouldn't swop my own station in life with that poor distracted woman this night,"—just as she said this, in walked the Heiress herself! We hadn't a word in us. Though the courts, it was said, allowed her a few shillings a week until their decision would be made, the poor woman had become quite old-looking and feeble, her hands were crooked and skinny, and her face pinched with the hunger and cold. It was a great pity she ever heard of this

American money at all: her mind was going. We made room for her at the fire, and she spread her blue hands out to the heat of it.

She seemed greatly disturbed. There she sat gazing at the heart of the fire, not speaking a word, nor understanding a word of what we were saying. It was likely she was thinking of the one thing always. Maggie Maw had said "Sh!" as soon as she came in the door; then she rose and pinched the Blind Man and told him who the visitor was, and after that we had great trouble in keeping up some sort of conversation.

Yes, not one word of our gossip did the Heiress pay attention to. Maggie Maw, good-hearted soul as she was, would hand her the snuff-box or bid her draw in to the fire—and a fine fire it was, for the Heiress's boots began soon to steam in front of it—they were sodden from her wanderings in the guttery streets. And generally Maggie treated her as you'd see a mother treating a child that was beginning to get better after a long sickness.

At ten o'clock the Heiress got up and went out as silently as she had come in, our eyes following her to the door.

It took us some time to get back to our joking. At last, however, we saw the shoemaker hold out a little tin box of tacks he had to Maggie Maw, as if it were a box of the best snuff. Without stopping to look at it, she put it away in the middle of whatever she was saying to the Blind Man. Then the cobbler said, mimicking the gentle way in which she had spoken to the Heiress:

"Maybe you'd draw in to the fire, ma'am, you're after travelling a power and all, to judge be the state of your boots." She got cross with him.

"Mr. Ahern," she said, "maybe you didn't see the

tears running down the cheeks of that poor misfortunate creature ?"

"Go on, now, Maggie," he said, trying to put her off.

"'Tis no lie," she said.

"There were no tears," he said.

"There was."

"Was she swinging on her stool, back and forwards ?" said the Blind Man.

"She was so-a !" said Maggie.

"The poor thing," said the Blind Man, "is it how she's after hearing she's not the real heiress at all ?"

"'Tis worse than that."

"In the name of God, how could it be worse ?"

"Well, 'tis worse, 'tis far worse !"

"Go 'long, Maggie, go 'long with you !" said the shoemaker, as if he was ashamed of her lies.

"'Tis worse I'm telling you," she repeated.

They kept it up that way, the two of them, until the Blind Man had to put out his stick straight before him :

"Stop now, all of ye, stop ! stop ! I say, and let us hear what the woman has to say."

Well, then they stopped, and Maggie after settling her hair began :

"And I coming down the Parade who did I see on before me but herself —"

"Ah !" the shoemaker said, not caring if she stopped again.

"Don't mind your Ah's or your Oh's, if you please, sir, or I'll rise up this minute and walk out that door !"

Not one of us said a word ; and Maggie went on :

"There she was, walking on before me, and I hardly knew her, 'cause it wasn't her own natural walk at all she had, but a grand sort of walk, with her head stuck up in

the air, like them painted damsels on the stage that you'd see going around with little pug-dogs in their arms—well, there she was walking along like wan of them : ' Glory be to God,' I says to meself, ' is it how the poor thing is going out of her mind entirely ? ' and so I followed along through the crowd, and leave me tell you, 'tis around her the crowd was going, for she wouldn't get out of the way for any of them, not she —"

Maggie took breath here, and then she turned towards the Blind Man, touching his arm : " Would you believe me, sir, I forgot where I was going with following her. God knows I followed her like you'd follow a poor foolish man who would have a drop of drink in him, afraid he'd do some harm to himself — "

" Go on with the story," said the Blind Man ; his poll was back against the wall, and his face was staring at the ceiling.

" Sudden-like she stops ; and there was a grand closed-up motor car standing beside the pathway ; and over she steps, and in she gets, as quick as lightning, and bangs in the door after her. ' Hey ! ' says one of them news-boys to the driver—he was sitting half-asleep in the front of the car—' Hey ! ' he says, ' look at who's after going in ! '—and just then out of the shop comes the grand lady who owned the motor. Ah, 'tis then there was the confusion, and nobody but meself there to explain the ins and outs of the whole affair, and I trying to talk to three or four people at the one time. If you please, she didn't want to come out ! ' Who are ye ? ' she says. ' Go 'way,' she says, ' I don't know wan of ye,' she says—"

" Look at that for you ! " said the Blind Man.

" ' Drive on,' she says. Well, sir, it was I got her out, and a hard job I had to keep her out of the hands of the police— "

"And was that the time I saw ye ?" said the shoemaker.

"It was then, and though she's an heiress an' all, I'm not one bit sorry for what I done—so there!"

"'Tis how she thought she had the money in her fist—oh dear!" said the Blind Man.

"As I'm after saying, I wouldn't swop with her this night," said Maggie Maw.

"Is there anything worse than being mad ?" questioned the Blind Man.

We couldn't say.

"There is," he said, "'tis worse to be half-mad."

"How so-a ?" said John Ahern.

"Because 'tis only the people who are half-mad knows they're mad at all—"

"That's a fact, anyway."

"If that poor woman was swinging backwards and forwards on her stool, like Maggie says she was, the tears were running down her face all right—and no wonder."

"And to think," says Maggie Maw, "all the singing she used to have in her and she selling her handful of apples on the Square—"

"That's what herself was thinking of and she sitting there to-night—" the Blind Man broke in.

"What makes you say that ?"

"What else brought her back to the old spot ?" he answered.

"Praise be to God," said Maggie, looking up at his calm face, "the blind do be very wise," and then she added, "well, God leave us the senses anyway, money or no money."

THE COBBLER'S DEN.

III.

THE WAKE.

" In spite of all," said Maggie, " that Hannah Gillane is a proud wan, and the spirit's not broke in her."

" She was always proud," said John Ahern.

" She was; but 'tisn't everywan would be proud after suffering such a power and all as she's after suffering."

" She's after suffering a lot, God knows; there she is now with neither chick nor child—and such a lot of them there one ten years ago."

We kept still a moment; and then Maggie Maw said:

" Supposing you or me or anywan else in the lane got news home that our last boy was lying dead beyond in America, what would be the first thing we'd do?"

We didn't answer; we knew our ideas wouldn't satisfy Maggie.

" I'll tell you," she continued, " ye'd call a neighbour in—thanks be to God, the lane, bad and all as it is, isn't without a kind neighbour yet—well, ye'd call a neighbour in; and then another neighbour, that would be just after hearing the news, would come in, and then ye'd have a good cry over the boy—God between us and all harm—and 'twould do everywan a world of good."

" 'Twould that," said the shoemaker, his head bent on the boot that was caught between his knees.

" But what does she do?—Not a word out of her to

man or mortal ; but on with her bonnet, and out with the purse, and she fastens the door behind her, and away she goes—business-like to the last—and buys everything that's fitting and decent for a Christian wake—think of that, and the boy lying dead, and maybe buried, beyond in America—thousands upon thousands of miles away ! "

At this point, the Blind Man came in, put his stick in a corner, and lighted his pipe. While he was settling himself, Maggie's eyes were bent on the fire, and there was a look of great activity in them.

" 'Tis of Hannah Gillane we're talking, sir," she said to the Blind Man when he was settled.

" God help her," he took the pipe from his mouth, " 'tis she have the great sorrow this night."

" But did ye hear tell what happened at the wake ?—maybe ye didn't ? "

" What wake ? "

" The wake over the boy in America."

" She hadn't a wake surely ? "

" She had then, and a good wake."

" Oh my ! "

" But leave me tell ye."

We made ourselves comfortable. We had heard whispers in the lane : now we were about to hear the full and all of it ; after all there was no one like Maggie : when she told you a story there was no fear you'd hear it better elsewhere ; nothing ever escaped her.

" Well, at the beginning, leave me tell ye, 'twas such a terrible lonesome thing to see the four candles lighting on their four cold plates—and lovely plates they were—and the room done up, so spotless and shining you could take your meals off the floor, and the bed laid out, and, God help us ! nothing on it ! 'Twas the lonesome look of the bed was the worst ; as I say, I shivered —"

"No wonder," said the shoemaker.

"And no real corpse I ever seen made me shiver—isn't that strange?"

"I can believe you."

"Well, there were four or five market-women sitting in the room, one here and another there, and not a word out of them; and there was herself, with her white, stony face, and her best clothes on her, and she going about, cold and independent, and she saying: 'Maybe ye'd rather a drop of wine.'"

"Oh my! Oh my!" said the Blind Man, picturing it all.

"Yes, indeed; you'd think 'twas a heart of stone she had. God knows 'twas as much as I could do to keep without coming away again; but sure that would be a frightful thing to do."

"'Twould indeed."

"'Whatever'll come of it, I'll take a chair, anyway,' I said, and I sat down in a quiet little corner, away from anyone. Well, there we were, sitting silent for a long time, and then, little by little, we got to talking of one thing and another; but all the same what was I doing but counting up the hours. Every time I heard Shandon strike, and we were so silent-like, I heard every quarter of it—I'd say: 'I'll stay another half-hour, and that's all.'"

"It must be terrible on you."

"'Twas, cold and lonesome and sad, and all on account of that empty bed. But maybe herself had something to do with it, too, for now—'erra leave me alone, 'tisn't like human nature at all she is—"

"That's true anyway."

"Is she now?—with her white face, and her slow eyes, and not a tear out of them. No wonder we were afraid

to leave the second word out of us for fear we'd say something would offend her. And what happened in the end—well, 'twas all her own fault in a way."

"How so-a?"

"I'll tell you, then,—because when people are happy and talking they don't drink half as much as they do when they're gloomy and silent—hushed-up-like in themselves, nothing to do but drink the drink that's put before you—and let me tell you, 'twas good drink, too—I'll say that for her."

"So you may."

"After a while, when we were getting a little nice in ourselves, we began to find our tongues all right, and then there was talk and plenty of it, and, indeed, maybe too much of it. Anyway, 'twas after getting to be like any ordinary Christian wake—except for the bed, of course—and there was Shandon striking out the hours fine and bold, and not one of us thinking of stirring."

"But herself?"

"The same as ever, not a word out of her."

"God help her," said the Blind Man.

"We were nearly after forgetting her by this. All of a sudden, as will happen at the best of wakes, the talk stopped, and there was no one ready to keep it going; 'twas very awkward, you know, and so at last poor Moll Meany—(she was very salubrous in herself, let me tell you) what does she do but look up towards the bed, and sure I suppose she couldn't see the wall, not to mind the bed; looks up at the bed, and blinks her little eyes at it, and says, like as if it was any ordinary, homely wake: 'Isn't it the handsome corpse he is!'"

"She did!" said the Blind Man.

"Would you believe me, we all looked up at the head of the bed before we knew what we were doing! When I

thought of what we were after doing, well, I felt I'd go down through the ground with shame."

"But herself?"

"Up she gets, mad and tearing, and she whiter than ever—'Out with ye,' she says, 'ye pack of tipplers, ye pack of tipplers, ye pack of dirty tipplers!' 'Twasn't long or lazy we were making for the door—all except poor Moll herself—between us we had to bring her down; and 'twas a job we had with that fierce woman pitching us to the dogs and calling on her dead boy to take her away from us! Wasn't that a terrible thing?"

"A terrible thing, right enough," said the shoemaker.

"'Twas—and do you know I'd be ashamed to meet that woman in the lane now, I couldn't face her, I'd be afraid."

"You needn't then," said the Blind Man, "'tisn't of you or Moll Meany that woman is thinking."

THE COBBLER'S DEN.

IV.

THE FORGIVENESS.

There was a sort of hub-bub in the lane, a quiet sort of hub-bub, people going from door to door, and stopping in the street to talk with one another. And it was all on account of what the Night Watchman had said about Theig Gorman, the mason. It wouldn't have mattered in the least if it were about anyone else he had said it; since it was about Theig, however, it filled us with wonder, for he was like no one else in the place. He had been, as long as any of us remembered, living with his sister in a little house in a corner of The Alley. It was the only house in the place that had geraniums in the window, it was the only house that kept no lodgers. Neither he nor she troubled anyone, and no one troubled them: they lived quietly and alone. He was a hard, bitter old man, and she was a quiet, devout woman, who spent much of her time in the Franciscan Church. And so for long periods, he being so hard and forbidding-looking, and she so quiet and silent, you would not hear even their names mentioned, not to mind hearing any news about them. For all that, no boy or girl ever grew up in the lane without coming to know that there was some mystery about the dark, silent man who lived in the nicely-kept house in The Alley, without coming to know also that the mystery was whether or not Theig Gorman was a married man.

Beyond this the young people never went; they began to grow old, the question remaining as dark as ever. If he were a married man, there was no one to say that he had ever seen the wife or knew where she lived or whether she had not long since died. The little house with the geraniums in the window kept its secret.

This evening it was the Blind Man began—he said:

"After all the years I'm going around the lanes, I couldn't swear this moment he's a married man; maybe he's not, maybe 'tis only a rumour that got out sometime about him, and that he only laughed at it in the beginning, and after a while—"

"Don't you know very well that Father Lenihan asked him the question plump and plain—?"

"Well, an' if he did, what answer did he get?"

"'Meaning no disrespect, Father,' he says, 'tis so long ago I can't tell'—that's what he said."

"And what would a person take out of that?"

"That he was married once upon a time, anyway?"

"But how could a man forget whether he was married?"

"Maybe he didn't forget?"

"And the world and all knows that that poor sister of his came from America to keep house for him, and he still a young man, for that's forty year ago, if 'tis a day."

"Very well, and what brought her home? Believe you me there was something very strange behind all that—a young man to bring his sister home from America to keep house for him, and she earning good money over there!"

"Wisha! if he was married itself, no blame to anyone for going away from him, for he was always a sour, crabbèd sort of man—" It was a stray customer of John Ahern's said this, and the Blind Man didn't like it.

"But was he always sour and crabbèd?"

"Erra, he was, ever and always," said John himself.

And then Maggie Maw came in, grave, yet shining, a light in her eyes. The first word she said was: "I have it all!" And so we made room for her—our own Maggie.

"Now, for the love of God, don't let one of ye say hum nor haw out of ye, for 'tis the queer, outlandish thing is after happening in this lane: last night it happened and we all asleep in our beds!"

Up the shoemaker straightened his back and looked at us:

"I knew I heard something," he said, staring us all in the face.

"You did not!" said Maggie, and she stared back at him, with fire in her eyes. Soon enough his head went down:

"Maybe I didn't," he said, beginning again to work silently.

"Theig Gorman is a married man," said Maggie, after a while.

"Go on!" we said, all of a heap. The Blind Man took his pipe from his lips, John Ahern nodded his head as if to say "I knew it, I knew it."

"Married in Tralee town, forty years ago, come next September," Maggie added.

And again the shoemaker nodded, as if he knew that, too; and Maggie caught sight of him doing so:

"Mr. Ahern," she said, "maybe you'll tell us where his wife was all these long, forty years?"

But he was trying too hard to pull out a nail that had gone in crooked, to answer her; he was a poor fool of a man, at the best.

"Where was she, Maggie?" said the Blind Man, quietly.

"Running mad in the wilds of Kerry—there's a damsel for you!" she answered, flinging up her head.

There never was such a story.

"Maybe I'm too hard on her; but it seems she was a barmaid in some house there, and me young mason from Cork—he wouldn't be more than twenty then, I suppose—took up with her, and married her. Well, when the job was done, when the convent was built, and me mason thinking of bringing home his bride, lo and behold you, me lady escapes and there's no tidings of her!"

"Hoity-toity," said John Ahern.

"Neither tale nor tidings of her. The poor man comes home to his empty shell of a house, and has to write off to America, begging and imploring his sister to come home and live with him, and save him from the lodging-house keepers. And so she did. And she earning good money and all at the gussetting, up she gets and comes home, and keeps house for her brother, and he a sour and a bitter man that would be getting worse and worse as the years went by. Well, if there's anywan will be rewarded by the God above for doing her duty, 'tis that girl Hetty Gorman, though 'tis an old woman she is now, by the same token."

"She is that—you could tell it by the way she walks," said the Blind Man.

"Well, sir," Maggie took up her tale again, "the years go by—well and good; but first I ought to tell you that Theig himself went down to Tralee, all the way, three times he went down, looking for her, and all in vain: even the priests couldn't help him; me fine lassie wouldn't be said by man or mortal, only take her fling as long as she was young and handsome. He soon got sick of it, trying to bring the wanderer home; I can vouch for it myself

he didn't sleep a night out of his little house in the corner for the last thirty-seven years."

"Are you sure of that now?" said the shoemaker, foolishly. Maggie raised up her eyes and was about to say something very saucy when the Blind Man said: "Go on, Maggie," quietly and gravely; he was not a bit like John Ahern, he was now probably thinking of how very different from his expectation these long years of marriage had turned out for the mason. The thoughtful tone of his voice solaced Maggie, and she went on with more life and earnestness:

"At last after forty years, to make a long story short, the Missioners—the Redemptorists—and sure they're the hardest of all, come to Tralee. The tents are set up outside the chapel. The lights are blazing. The chapel is crowded to the doors, morning and evening and all day long; and everyone is talking about the mission, and back-biting the people who aren't taking advantage of it; and every morning the Missioners go round the lanes to the houses of the real bad ones—"

"Maybe they caught herself?"

"They did, as nice as tuppence; and they heard out her story, and they wouldn't promise her one bit of satisfaction till she'd go up to Cork and see whether her lawful husband was alive or dead; and in case he was alive, she was to ask his forgiveness and go and live with him if so he'd choose. And so she done. Over the mountains she came—who knows but she walked it?—anyway, and we all in here last night, saying our say, she steals up the lane outside, a poor rag of a woman, a poor sop off of the roads, not knowing what was before her, up the lane she steals and in by the house in the corner. She knocks at the door. Poor Hettie takes her in; himself was out. For a long time she can't speak with the fit of coughing

that was on her, and the fright, too, maybe. Anyway, she outs with her story, and Hettie says to her :

" ' 'Tis business for himself ; you must wait till he comes home ! ' "

" Now, here's a queer thing. Nor bite nor sup would she take, only asked and implored to be let alone, sitting before the fire, and the tails of her old skirt steaming, and the cough racking her, and when the fit would be over, nodding her head and shaking herself back and forward and not saying a word. The livelong night poor Hettie went about her business, sweeping the floor, or what not, and maybe killing the poor soul with the sight of the nice clean little house and all the comfort was waiting her all the years if only she thought well to come home to it."

" That's right, Maggie," said the Blind Man.

" What else could the misfortunate creature do only cry down her two eyes ? " she then questioned us, with strong faith in her own insight.

" You're right, Maggie," said the Blind Man, again.

" 'Twas near twelve o'clock when himself came up the lane. The two of them could hear his heavy boots pounding the paving stones. ' That's himself,' said Hettie. The poor thing took with a tremble. ' Lave me out,' she says, and up she jumps and makes for the door like a cat. But Hettie came between her and the door—them quiet women do be very brave, ' As ye came so far, 'tis as good for ye to see himself,' she says, and just then they heard Theig outside. Back the poor wanderer jumps again and curls up before the fire on the bit of a stool with her back to them all, and pulls the shawl over her head. And in walks the man-of-the-house ! He came in heavy and silent, like he is always. Hettie says nothing. He says nothing. He looked at the poor

thing, and thought 'twas how she was some poor traveller having a heat of the fire. At last he takes the candlestick and has his foot on the first step of the stairs and is going up to bed when Hettie says, very calm-like, 'Theig,' she says, 'ye'd better talk to your lawful wedded wife.'

"Erra, you'd think he was struck. He took one step into the room, and over with him to the poor trembling creature, and he drags the shawl back off of her head, and holds the candle into her face, and then he jumps back and he ups with his fist and he says: 'Get out!' 'Get out!' he roars at her, and he hardly able to say that same with the smother of rage he was in.

"She didn't stir. He didn't know what to do then. 'Get out of it,' he roared at her again. She didn't stir, only clung against the wall. There wasn't a sound out of her. He had the middle of the floor all to himself. He turned to his faithful sister:

'Hettie,' he says, 'what brought her in?'

'The Grace of God,' she answers.

"Look at that!" said the Blind Man, "the Grace of God."

"He wouldn't be pacified. He sprang at the door, and nearly tore it down off its hinges in his hurry to open it; and he says:

'Out with you, ye—, or there'll be human blood spilt on the thrashold of this house this night!'

"The poor drudge got up, and pulled her shawl over her head, and gave one look at Hettie, meaning to ask her to intercede for her—'You'll forgive her, Theig?' Hettie says, calm-like again.

"'Never, so help me!' said the wild man, and out he flings her, not caring whether she fell or stood, and he bangs the door behind her, and goes up to bed without a word out of him."

"Well, that Hettie Gorman is a wise woman. She knew her place better than to open that door after he banging it like that. She just held her tongue and when she was ready, up she goes to her bed."

"And then the Night Watchman—" began the shoemaker.

"Go on, Mr. Ahern," said Maggie, folding her arms. He couldn't go on without spoiling it. He made a sign of submission, and Maggie went on:

"In the middle of the night, just before the dawn came in, poor Hettie woke up, for she thought she was after hearing a moaning. She tried to put it out of her head. She couldn't. And then it came again. She lit her candle. 'What am I to do, in the Name of God?' she says. And the terrible moaning came up again. She got up then and went to her brother's door; she thought he'd be asleep. My dear, she found him sitting up in his bed, as white as a ghost, and he scared, and his eyes standing in his head. He could hardly talk to her

'Did ye hear it?' he said.

'I did,' she said.

'Is it of this world?' he says, watching her face.

"What was he thinking but maybe the woman threw herself into the tide after the terrible things he said to her.

"'Forgive her, Theig,' says Hettie, putting her hand on his poor old head.

"''Tis she's crying, you're sure?' he says.

"''Tis herself, and she's fasting, and falling with the weakness that's on her.'

"'Tell her I forgive her, only to have her go away out of this.'

"Down Hettie comes; but the poor thing, clung up against the door like an old cat in the morning, wouldn't

take the forgiveness from any lips except his own—the priests wouldn't believe her. So up comes Hettie again :

" ' Put your head out that window, and say the one word, and leave the poor soul go away in peace.'

" He did that. ' I forgive you,' he says, ' all and everything, only go away in the Name of God, and don't trouble me ever again.'

" ' I'm thankful,' she says, and away she went like a ghost.

" And mind you even that much couldn't happen unknownst. Who should be passing on his rounds but the Night Watchman, and he hears the words coming down in the night—' Only go away in the Name of God, and don't trouble me any more '—and he sees the poor shadow of a woman gliding away, and he thinks and thinks, and blabs the whole story all over the place—God forgive him."

. . . . . .

That is one of the nights in the Cobbler's Den I remember most distinctly, for Maggie's tale took a long, long time to tell, and when it was over the Blind Man stood up and said :

" Glory be to God, it must be very late—I never heard the lanes so silent," and on that word we all listened and sure enough there wasn't a stir.

" I declare," said the shoemaker, " 'tis after twelve ! " And so we all stood up, Maggie saying " I'll be kilt "—and made, all of us, for the door. But Maggie pushed us back again as soon as we reached it—" Whisht ! Whisht ! " she said. And sure enough we heard the sound of a sleepy old horse-and-car coming over the cobbles, and we saw the lantern shining as it moved along. Well, we stood silent in the dark old hall-way, and we saw an old scotch car, piled with Theig Gorman's furniture,

go by, and there were all Hettie's geraniums, packed together into a table that was turned upside down. A gas-lamp was shining on them, and the flowers were nodding and shaking as the car jolted.

"That's all the fault of that Watchman, God forgive him," said Maggie again. Theig Gorman went to live in the North Side, and we knew him no more.

THE COBBLER'S DEN.

V.

THE REVENGE.

When Maggie came in she said: "The last of the Riordans is dead—God be merciful to her soul."

"'Tis a happy release," said John Ahern.

"Well, 'tis; but in spite of everything, and the hard name and all, the Riordans are an old stock in these parts, and 'tis only natural that a person would be sorry after them."

"Nora Riordan was never the same after Jer. Madigan's funeral."

"She wasn't, how could she?"

"That's twenty-five years ago," said the Blind Man.

"'Tis, and more," said the shoemaker, and he took a mouthful of tacks, as if there was no more to be said.

"'Tis twenty-five years next month, the twelfth," was Maggie's way of confirming quietly the Blind Man's estimate.

"'Tis more," said the shoemaker, as well as he could, without looking up.

"'Tis twenty-five years, neither no more nor no less," said Maggie, again with that quietness which invites any amount of argument. The Blind Man put his stick out straight in front of him; it was his way of ruling:

"What does a few years matter to her now and she dead?" he said.

"Or a few pounds?" said John Ahern.

I knew that Nora Riordan was Mrs. Kenneally's maiden name; in the Cobbler's Den old neighbours never lost their maiden names; in these lanes the very children will speak of their mothers as Nora Kelly or Julia Murphy, and at a certain stage of growth are often puzzled over their own names. But my memory did not go back twenty-five years, and so I did not remember Jer. Madigan's funeral.

I beseeched them to let the telling of it to Maggie, knowing that we would never get to the end of it if it was John Ahern or the Blind Man undertook it. For Maggie Maw could not be kept quiet; she would interrupt them at every second word, putting in little things they would have forgotten; the only chance, then, of hearing it outright from start to finish, was to give it altogether to herself. After a moment's pause, she would begin as if the story lay ready before her mind; perhaps she used to be turning such things over and over—she was not able to read. She began in a hard voice:

"The woman that's now lying a corpse—God be merciful to us all—in the Dead House of the Union—'tis she was the hard woman and the able dealer. She could make money out of the stones, as the saying is. What good did it do her—? The devil a ha'p'orth! No doubt she made it honest, but she made it hard. What she made out of the shop—I call that honest money—though 'twas money made out of drink itself. But what she made by other means, *by other means*, well, that's what got her the hard name. Listen, till you hear it, child."

Maggie would call anyone "child" on occasion.

"There was one thing—she kept the best of whiskey—that can't be denied; and she kept a snug house, with

a good fire in it, and a red blind on the window, that would be shining down the lane, shining red in the black pools of water at night-time when the gas would be lighting inside it. 'Twas a great help to her—the name the house had for the good stuff. There wasn't a better-known shop in the parish. It was only out of your own door and into Miss Nora's. If you had a visitor, or if it was a marriage, or a death, or a christening, or a boy coming home from the sea or what not—well, 'twas into Miss Nora's with everywan—our second home it was. But for all that, 'twasn't out of the house she made her money: 'twas this way: If you had an old father with a cough, or an old mother with a fatty heart, or a poor child wouldn't live to be a man—well, she'd come at the blind side of you and insure him or her—as the case may be—with a dead-man for a few pence in the week, or maybe a shilling, and then in a year or two or three there'd be my brave Miss Nora getting her twenty, or thirty, or maybe her forty pounds from the insurance company, neat and clean into her hands! When anybody in the place died, what we used to say was: 'There's a score of pounds for Miss Nora!' And so it would turn out."

"That's how she made her money, the most of it, and not out of the house at all; and sure 'twas a mean and stingy way, and a way that couldn't try (thrive) with anyone. She insured Kate Madigan's old father, old Jer. Madigan, as well as anyone else, expecting he'd die in a year or two; but sure he didn't die in ten years, not to mind two! There she was, paying and paying until she was sick and tired of it; to make it worse the poor old man turned daft in the end, went about laughing and smiling and showing his teeth at everyone, and talking about nothing else, up and down the lane, only how Nora Riordan was waiting for him to die and he not going

to die at all! He got that small with the age that when he'd go into her house, his head wouldn't hardly reach up to the counter; and there he'd stand, not caring who'd be in the shop, looking up at her, and laughing, and he saying:

"'I'm geh, geh, geh!'"

"That's so," said the Blind Man, "'I'm geh!' that's what he used to say."

"Child," Maggie began again, "that was his way of saying 'I'm dead, dead, dead!' making game of her, you know, he'd be; and after saying that, he'd come out, laughing like a poor idiot, and go up and down the lane again, telling everyone the great joke he was after playing on Miss Nora. My dear, she was belled all over the parish."

"Well, it went on like that, year after year; but faith'n she never gave in; she kept on paying her shilling a week, and at last in the middle of one of the hardest winters we ever had in these parts, after a terrible wild and stormy night, poor Kate Madigan found her old father stiff and cold in his bed. And, signs on it, she hadn't a penny in the house! Not a penny to wake him or bury him. What could she do but go down to Miss Nora's and explain her case? And so she did. And what did Miss Nora say? 'He's dead—is he? Well, he wasn't in much of a hurry anyway!' That's what she said; and not one brown copper would she give poor Kate. She wouldn't even offer her the loan of it. Kate was a poor harum-scarum of a woman, and that hard answer made her frantic; indeed it made all of us frantic. I remember well myself the talk and the arguing, as it spread around the lane, and I remember hearing Kate herself calling down the curse of God on the Riordans, all that ever came and went of them and all that would ever

come. I don't say that was right, but I remember it; there she was, standing all alone in the middle of the lane, her hair wild and streaming, and her shawl in a wisp, and the rain falling on her, and the night coming down, and she never caring a brass pin, and all of us pitying her, and peeping out of the doors, and waiting to know how 'twould all end. I needn't tell you Miss Nora never came near the door at all. She was too respectable, my dear. But at last poor Kate stopped up, sudden and sharp, in the middle of a fit of screaming, and out loud she says: 'I know what I'll do,' and away in home she went. And we all said 'She's distracted, poor thing—God guide her this night.'"

"That's so," said the Blind Man, "distracted she was."

"The day for the funeral came. There we were, snapping up our poor piece of a dinner to have it over us, and peeping out the window at the same time for fear we might be late. The coffin, a poor shell of a thing that would hardly hold together during the journey, the coffin went up to her top room all right; we all saw it; but beyond the coffin not another sign of a funeral did anyone see up the lane or down the lane. There wasn't a hearse nor a car nor a carriage nor a bit of linen nor a black band nor anything else whatsomever. Well, at last, and we taking our drink of tea, we saw all the men moving towards the house; and there sure enough was the coffin up on their shoulders, ready to start. Wherever they came from, a multitude of people had gathered round. There they were, a black mass of them around the coffin on every side. Down comes poor Kate Madigan herself, as harum-scarum looking as ever, her hair flying in the wind—and a bad wintry day it was. She stands in the middle of them, and up she stretches her hand,

and her arm bare to the elbow—'Round the block, men!' she says, like a general giving his commands. And so they began to move, herself after the coffin, and her shawl back over her head. No hearse, no anything, only the coffin up on their shoulders and the crowds moving behind it. Well, they went up the Alley, around Coppinger's Lane, down Galwey's Lane, out under the archway, and along through Hatton's Court, and that brought them straight in front of Miss Nora's house. When they came near it, Kate Madigan catches the two ends of her shawl in her hands and stretches it from her on both sides, and up she lifts her voice, and begins keening poor Jer. that was up in front of her in the coffin. She was that loud and wild in her screaming that dead and all as he was, you wouldn't know how he could keep himself from hearing her. 'You left me to pull and to drag!' she says, 'You left me to pull and to drag in a world of deceivers!' Everyone knew the meaning she had in them words. And those that didn't were very soon told it, I can tell you. On they passed; and Miss Nora all the time was inside, as stiff as a statue, and her face like marble, and she not daring to come and take a peep out through the window. On they passed, and they came at last back to where they started from, and maybe they thought to stop. Well, if they did, up again goes Kate Madigan's arm, and her fingers working with hate—'Round again, men,' she says, and they obeyed her without a word.

"The crowds of the world were after them. I saw them myself this time and they coming out under the archway, and 'twas how they burst through it, burst through it like water out of a spout, and the coffin swinging to the right and to the left, and faith'n 'twas little peace the poor patient inside in it was getting, between the jolting and

the noise and the cries and poor Kate's keening. Again they went by Miss Nora's, and the house kept as silent as before. But if it did, there was poor Kate screaming like a witch, worse than the last time; she was after losing all control of herself by this; and when they reached the end she cries out again 'Round wanst more!' Well, she won! The third time, there was Father Long standing in the archway, and he blocked their passage, and he spoke quietly to poor Kate, for he saw she was in no fit state to be reasoned with, and he told her to take the coffin into the house again for the night, and that next day there'd be a hearse sent up and everything else was fitting. She consented. And so 'twas done. And only the next day did we learn that the second time the cries came outside her window, Miss Nora fell down in a dead mag—stiff to the world, and had to be lifted up to bed. Well, as Johnny here says, she was never the same afterwards. And there she's dead now above in the Hospital after all the money she made, and the grand family she reared and buried."

"'Tis no good to be too covetous," said John Ahern.

"'Tisn't," said the Blind Man, "pinching and screwing up for the future, and sure when the future comes there's the Will of God there before us, the same as ever. If It means us to be mad, we'll be mad; if It means us to be poor, we'll be poor; if It—"

"If It means us to be blind we'll be blind," said the foolish shoemaker. The Blind Man was staggered, but he was good enough for him.

"And if It means us to be a cobbler, a cobbler we'll be!" he answered, and he stood up the same as if he wasn't after saying anything at all. But Maggie Maw had to stick half of her shawl into her mouth and run.

THE COBBLER'S DEN.

VI.

MAGGIE'S WAY.

When it failed John Ahern to get poor Bridgie Heffernan away from the quay wall, to get her away from it and so avoid seeing the dreadful sight she would see if she remained, it was I who was sent to try to do what he had failed to do.

"She's clung again' them, and she neither saw me nor heard me when I spoke to her," John Ahern had explained.

"You only asked her the one time?" the Blind Man questioned.

"The one time, and that itself was a great trial out of me, you don't know the look she have on her."

I found Bridgie still clung against the bars of the slip, the slip from which her little boy, the only child she had left, had made his way into one of the empty fishermen's boats that always lie anchored there, and so had come by his death. With a bit of packing-case he had paddled her out to where his uncle's boat—the Lurline—lay moored in mid-stream, and then in getting from one boat into the other he had fallen between the two and was drowned. That is how his companions explained it, and no doubt they were right. Well, there now was the mother, her bony work-worn hands clutching the iron bars, staring

with mad eyes at the dragging operations that went on in the middle of the river. In the boat were three men: a large-bodied policeman filled all the stern, doing nothing it seemed except weighting the boat; the drowned boy's uncle, Jack Heffernan, in his thick fisherman's woollens, handled the rope to which the stroke-haul was fixed, while his son, Jim, grasping a long pole, stood ready to catch the body when it would have come near the surface. It was to prevent her from seeing the recovery of the dead body of her only child that we were trying to get Bridgie Heffernan away from the slip.

The work went on in silence now, in slowness, too, but when six hours earlier they began it, there was noise enough, hurry, too, people on either riverside shouting directions and advice. One could not imagine how the body could have escaped the hooks so long, considering that it was quite certain where the boy had been drowned. Yet escape the hooks it did, and unpleasant imaginations had begun to disturb the minds of those people who had been looking on a long time. What must it have been for the mother! She had become so silent and wild-looking that she stood now in the centre of a little cleared space, people watching her from behind or peeping at her sideways out of the corners of their eyes. When I saw that cleared space and noticed the wild white look she had about the eyes, I knew that I, too, should fail, and my heart sank. Little by little, however, I pushed through the crowds and at last got near her:

"Bridgie," I said, "there's John Ahern after wetting a cup of tea for you."

What I will not forget is the way she turned her head to see who had spoken, and then how she opened and shut her mouth a few times, moistening her lips with her tongue, as one might do after a long sleep. And her brows

worked a little, as if she were trying to recollect what had been said to her :

" Bridgie," I said again, " John Ahern is after wetting a cup of tea for you— " but before I had got half through the words she had turned away, and her eyes were now fixed again on the men in the boat. I lingered by her for some time, and remember noticing how you would not remark the sun shining on the water if it wasn't for the boat and the men in it. On them alone it seemed to shine, on the boat, the men, and on the white bright drops of water that were falling from the rope as Jack Heffernan hauled it in or dragged it along. But when you raised your eyes, there was the statue of the Blessed Virgin on the Dominican Church shining like gold, and beyond it and above it was Shandon Steeple shining, too ; and all the windows in the houses on that closely-built hillside were flashing back the sun like signals or burning like flares. It was a golden, sunny evening.

When I looked again at Bridgie she seemed not to be seeing anything at all ; listening she seemed to be, listening intently. Then I felt she wouldn't notice if I slipped away.

In John Ahern's there was a little crowd awaiting me. They wanted to question me. I forestalled them :

" Is Maggie after coming ? " I said.

" No—there's no trace of her anywhere ;—well—you didn't succeed ? "

" Leave me alone for God's sake," I said, " and let us all sit down or scatter away out of this until Maggie comes."

" Did you speak to her at all ? " said John Ahern.

He had his new coat still on him, and he looked very awkward, standing up, instead of sitting down, not knowing what to do with himself.

"You know very well I asked her." I was getting cross with them.

"Maggie Maw is never where she's wanted; that woman would break your heart sometimes," he said.

Someone else took up the talk:

"Another evening she'd be in and out like an old hen."

"Did ye try the market?"

"What's the use of saying that? I declare to God I'm sick and tired of answering that self-same question."

"You're right," said the Blind Man to me, "'twould be better for us to sit down and not to be losing our tempers; it might be better for you, John, to take off your coat and go on with your work."

"I will not go on with my work," he answered; he had often given the little lad who now lay in the river a penny for taking a finished job to the owner. "I will not go on with my work—what a thing I'd do!"

"Well," the Blind Man said again, "you might as well; there's no one but Maggie will get that poor creature to leave her post, by all I hear."

John Ahern would have answered back, but just then poor Bridgie Heffernan herself, the poor woman we had been talking about, appeared in the doorway: "Excuse me, neighbours," she said, and turned to look behind her, as if she didn't know what else to do or say; and there behind her, to our astonishment, was Maggie herself, her two hands steering the poor distracted creature along, just as you'd have to guide a blind man up a narrow gangway.

"You'll excuse us, John," said Maggie then, "you'll excuse us for making so free."

We thought that a rather queer thing for her to say; but anyway she had done what we had failed in, she had got the woman away from the quayside. And so we trusted that her way was right. We pushed back and

made room ; and over to the table she piloted the distracted woman—and a quiet soul that poor Bridgie Heffernan always was—sat her down at it, poured her out a cup of tea, poured one out, too, for herself, and without another word they began to drink it. We kept our eyes away from them, and John Ahern took off his coat and hung it up, slipped on his apron, and sat down to his bench ; the Blind Man took out his pipe and emptied it on the hob. And the meal went on, almost in dead silence, for a little while ; suddenly, however, Bridgie looked around at us, a half-eaten piece of bread in her hand, and nodded, with a curious look in her eyes, once or twice at John Ahern. He nodded back. Then she said, breaking out suddenly into rapid speech :

" If you want e'er a little boy to run a message for you, or tidy up the place, a little boy you'd like to have on the same floor with you, or maybe 'tis an apprentice itself you'd be wanting, and sure he's nearly old enough for that same, maybe you won't forget my little Paddy, sir ? "

" I won't forget him, ma'am," answered John Ahern, bravely enough, for all his astonishment. She nodded again at him, as if more than thankful, and then turned to the Blind Man (he was sitting perfectly still, a bit of a penknife stuck in the bowl of his pipe), and said, again with the same hurried speech :

" And you, sir, God knows 'tis often I gave you my heart's pity and you going along through the crowds without one with you or a word out of you, and if he'd be any company to you, or any help at all, there's that little boy of mine—a willing little child, and you'd like to hear him speaking, although he has no more sense for a boy of his age— "

We saw Maggie suddenly stand up ; we didn't know why : she had nodded at someone who had thrust a head

in at the doorway. She took the broken piece of bread from Bridgie's hand, just as you'd do to an infant who had got tired of a crust ; she then settled the shawl around her, took her arm and said :

" We'll be going home now, if you don't mind, Bridgie."

We knew then that the signal through the doorway meant that the body had been recovered. Poor Bridgie was staring at Maggie, quite dazed it seemed. Trying to gather her wits, she said :

" Home ? "

" That's your place, ma'am," Maggie returned. And then maybe the poor bothered woman saw the tears running silently down from Maggie's eyes, for at that moment she came to herself and you'd think her heart would break.

. . . . . .

" Look at that ! " said the shoemaker, when they were gone.

" Maggie's a great little 'oman ! " said the Blind Man, " how did she do it ? "

" No, but to get her to eat—that's what's puzzling me."

" 'Tis queer," said the Blind Man.

" 'Tis queer, and damn queer, too," said the shoemaker, " none of us could do it."

" 'Tisn't that at all I mean."

" Well, what do you mean, so-a ? "

" 'Tis this : now there's us, we have a Maggie in this lane, and in the next lane or the next lane to it, maybe they have a Maggie Maw of their own—who knows ? We don't know about their Maggie Maw, and they don't know about ours. Isn't that queer enough for you ? "

"'Tis," said John Ahern, he was staring through his glasses up at the Blind Man, trying to follow what he was saying.

"The name of that policeman you were telling me about, John, and Jack Heffernan's name and Jim's name, too—they'll all be in the paper, and right, too; but will you find Maggie's name in it?"

"You will not," we answered, in one voice.

"You will not," he went on, "and I say she's after doing something none of them could do."

"That's so."

"Those grand ladies that do be going about, poking their noses into our little places, they're very knowledgeable right enough; could any of them do what Maggie is after doing this evening, and she neither able to read or write?"

"They could not," said John Ahern.

"They could not," said I.

"Faith'n, they couldn't," said the Blind Man.

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